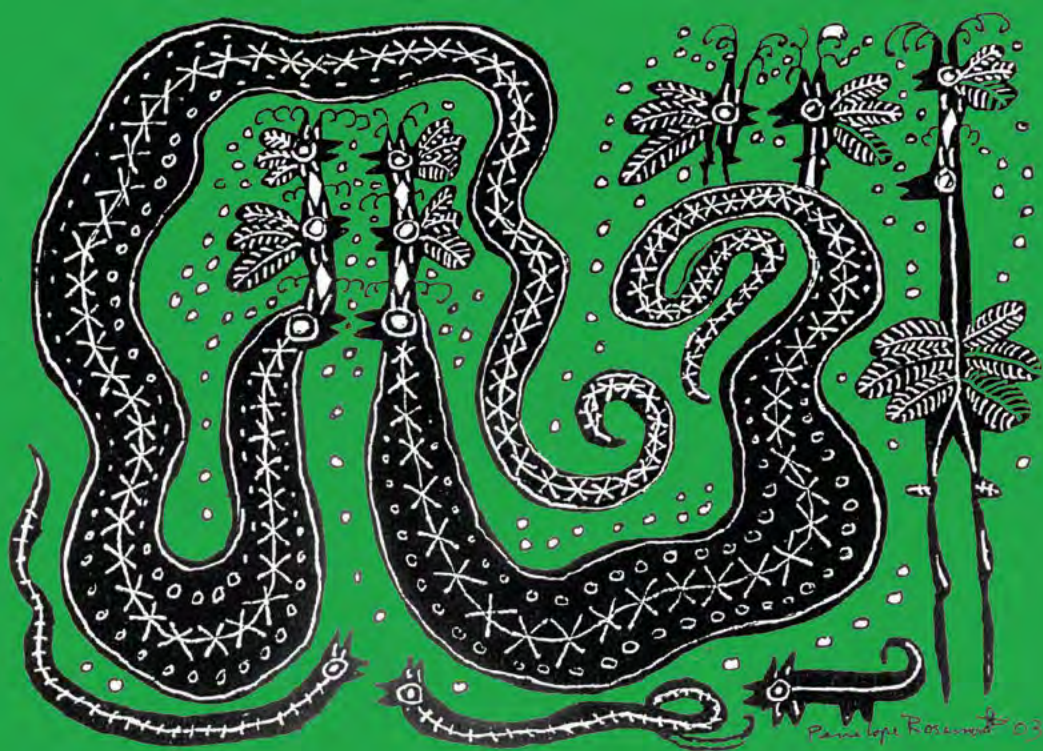


# Creating Anarchy



Ron Sakolsky





—James Koehnline

# Creating Anarchy



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Fifth Estate Books

2013  
Ardent Press

To  
Natasha  
evening star  
ray of light  
little red top  
spinning  
freely  
in the  
bebop  
night

2005

## Acknowledgements

This book was born in flames, nurtured with poetic laughter, and simmered in a sea of possibility. It is the fruition of an alchemical mix that only Pumpkin Hollow and Denman Island could have provided. As for me, I provided the words and the situation that brought us all together in this wild embrace, creating anarchy page by page. And special thanks go out to all the amazing artists who are credited within and the many behind-the-scenes participants in this project, including Gale Ahrens, Hakim Baker, Bernard Cooper, Beth Garon, Maurice Greenia, Sergio Lima, Sheila Nopper, Megan Schultz, Ed Varney, and Erik Violet.

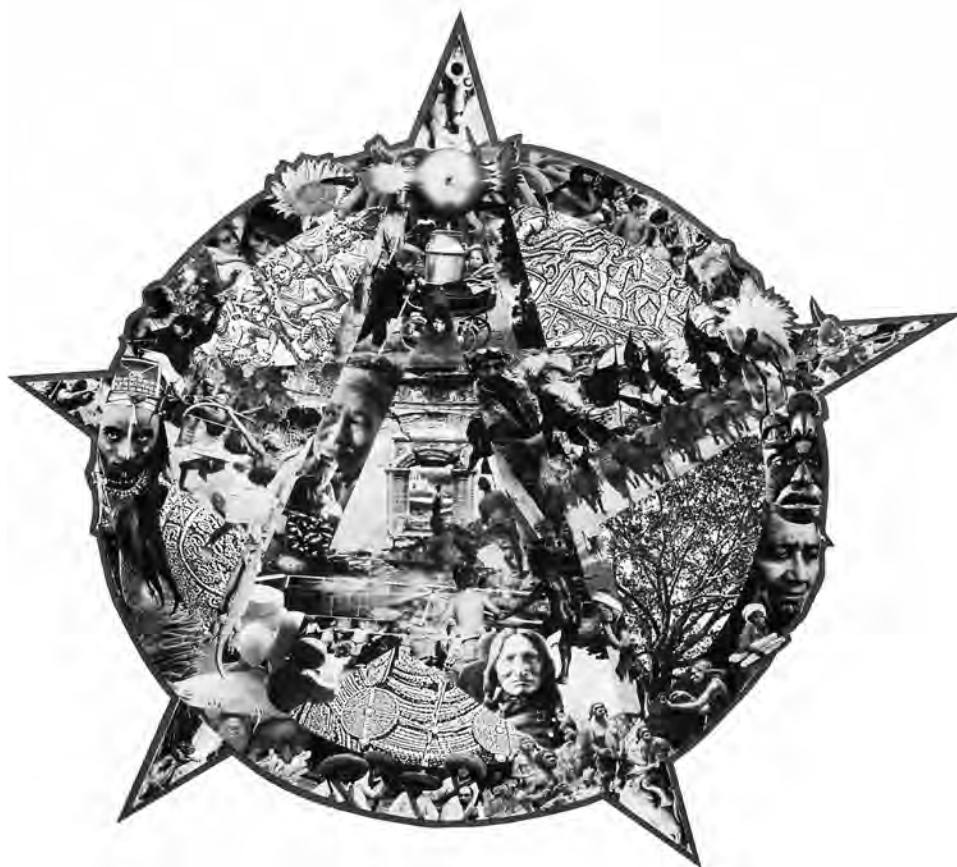
These selected writings have all been created since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most have been published before in a diverse array of dissident publications including (in alphabetical order): *Alternative Press Review*; *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*; *Black Sun*; *Confluence*; *Fifth Estate*; *Green Anarchy*; *Je Ne Sais Quoi*; *Lip* (online); *Minus Tides*; *The Oystercatcher*; *Social Anarchism*, and *Utopian Studies*. Two are culled from previously published volumes (one written for *Rebel Musics*, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, and the other from my introduction to the *AutonomeMedia* anthology which I edited, *Surrealist Subversions*). Almost all have been updated, reworked, and remixed since their original publication. Together, I envision them as composing a resplendent collage of dreams and ideas that has now taken on a life of its own. Three pieces are published here for the first time. All are bathed in the subversive light of anarchy and mad love.



# Contents

Introduction to the Second Edition	<i>ii</i>
Introduction	<i>vi</i>
Teaching Anarchy	2
Why Consent to Being Ruled at All?	8
Liberty Shield	18
Refusing The Marketplace	20
The Myth of Government-Sponsored Revolution	26
Puppets vs Puppets	36
Whose Streets, Our Streets	38
Hangin' Out on the Corner of Music & Resistance	46
Finding Your Voice	60
Firespitter	64
Anarchy in a Diasporic Key	76
Surrealist May Day Greetings!	82
Marvelous Freedom/Vigilance of Desire	84
Surrealist Desire, Anarchy & the Poetry of Revolt	90
Anarcho-Surrealist Poetics	128
Total Refusal	134
A Surrealist Re-Imagining of Canada	140
Black Star North	146
Dancing Waves	154
Utopia at Your Doorstep	176
My Life in the Academic Gulag	198
Occupying the Citadels of the Mind	212





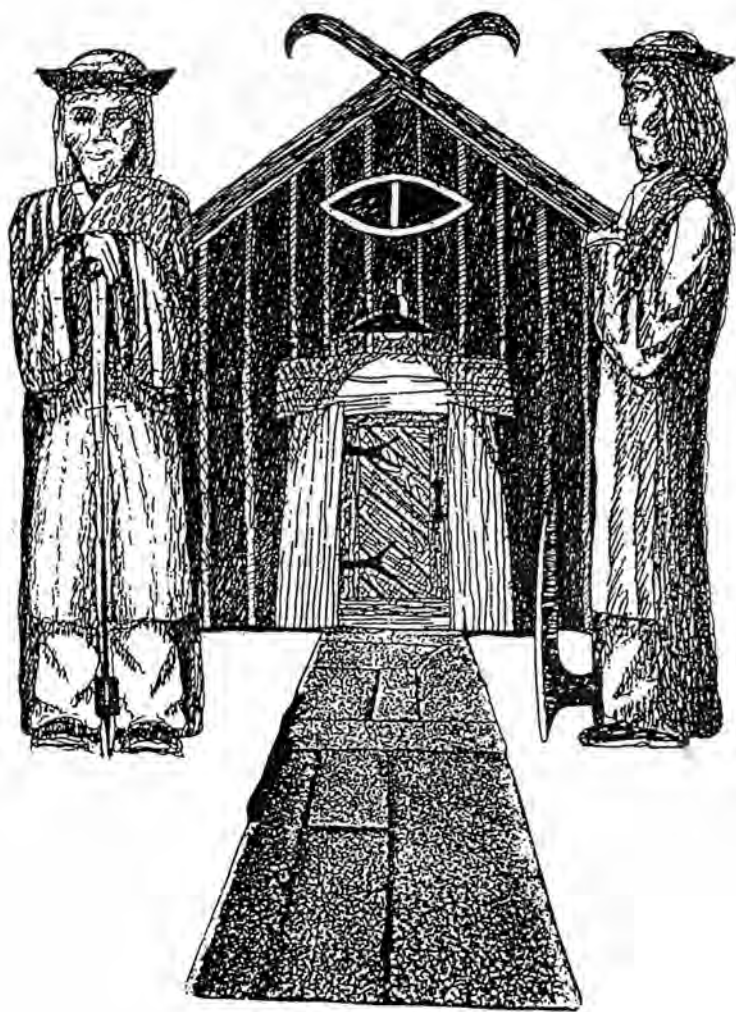
—Jesse Gentes

War is endured because it offers us a spectacle... a better and bigger kind of fireworks. It scares the hell out of us. It turns us inside out. There is its hold, its fascination... But the real secret lies in property! These are our guns, this our fleet. This is my country. My country? You poor little creature... What is yours? Your house... your job... your kitchen chairs and the number plate on the door...ah! but these don't belong to you. Where did you get them? By what right did they come to you. You worked for them? Worked...? What did you do? Oh, you sat in an office and put figures in a book. You even dug in a cold, water-filled ditch. But I have already told you that property is murder. Because of property people starve to death and are beaten by the police. Because of property millions of men are blown into bloody pieces... Refuse to murder in the name of the State, and you will find yourself behind bars—your house, your job, your kitchen chairs and the number plate over your door... kicked into the ditch you spent your life digging, your death but another figure you entered into the monstrous book of Capitalism. I ask for an unconditional overthrow of every last vestige of the world you will risk your life for tomorrow... Wars are conducted that the people may lose sight of their own need to wage war. The people always fight for the cause which enslaves them; that is, the cause of their rulers. A monstrous game is played.

—Kenneth Patchen,  
*Journal of Albion Moonlight*

THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST THE  
IMAGINATION  
ALL OTHER WARS ARE SUBSUMED IN IT

—Diane Di Prima,  
“Rant”



—Tomás Hajek

## Introduction to the Second Edition

Looking back at my original 2005 introduction from the vantage point of 2013, it is abundantly clear that the war against the imagination still rages around the world. The “anti-globalization movement”, which featured prominently in two of the pieces from the first edition, has largely faded from view except for occasional spirited confrontations like the 2010 throw-down that disrupted business as usual at the G20 summit in Toronto. The most radical dreams associated with the occupation of Tahrir Square now lie in the ruins of the ballot box. It appears that Occupy Wall Street has lately morphed into Occupy Sandy, and is attempting to walk a precariously fine line between mutual aid and social service volunteerism. The robust defiance of the Oakland Commune in its finest moments is sorely missed.

Yet, in spite of such challenges and setbacks, inspiring new flash-points of resistance have emerged in recent years. In Canada, the 2010 grassroots anti-Olympics convergence in Vancouver, with its catchphrase of “No Olympics on Stolen Land,” sparked a fertile new alliance between indigenous peoples and anarchists. Building upon that initiative is the ongoing Wet’suwet’en blockade of corporate attempts to ram the Pacific Trails pipeline through traditional unceded territory. Resistance there involves a refusal of passage for the pipeline’s toxic cargo of tar sands bitumen and fracked shale gas. In France, the utopian rebel armies of La Zad have erected a protest camp, which stands in barricaded opposition to airport-driven climate change and rural devastation, continuing to prove that creative forms of resistance have not disappeared from Europe.

In the case of the latter, the trenchant subterranean voice of the Zad encampment is Radio Klaxon. Despite the prevalence of a condescending attitude toward radio broadcasting on the part of contemporary digerati, who superficially consider it to be no more than an antiquated technology in the internet era, Radio Klaxon has flourished in the insurrectionary context of social war. As Free Radio Berkeley pioneer Stephen Dunifer has said about the continuing relevance of pirate radio to the

exercise of free speech and the fomentation of social unrest: “The reality is that if they come for my radio in the morning, they will come for your internet in the afternoon.” Though there has been some shuffling of bureaucratic papers at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) since the first edition of this book was published, the myth of government-sponsored revolution alluded to in the title of one of its articles remains as valid today as it was then.

Nevertheless, the Community Radio Act of 2010, which purportedly opens the window to as many as 800 new LPFM (low power fm) applications in the Fall of 2013, is being viewed as a victory in reformist circles. However, based on recent FCC history, it remains unlikely that many of those new licenses will go to grassroots groups. For anarchist broadcasters, the government’s proffered carrot of LPFM has always been seen as an obvious attempt at recuperation. From its inception, LPFM was specifically designed to justify a crackdown on existing pirate radio stations, to co-opt the free radio movement, and to provide an opportunity for the FCC to reassert its administrative authority in regulating on-air speech, issuing fines, and entering stations at any time without notice or a search warrant. Not surprisingly, there seems to be a major disconnect between the restrictive circuitry of LPFM and the expansive freedom of anarchy.

In the intervening eight years since *Creating Anarchy*’s anarcho-surrealist debut, there have been some notable deaths in the family. We have lost the “porcupine radio” poetics of Franklin Rosemont, the Vachean black humour of Don LaCoss and the unsubmissive blues of Jayne Cortez, who each in their own way played a role in the conceptualization and (sur)realization of the original edition. In the last few years, some new insights into the fascinating intersection of surrealism, dada, and individualist anarchy that cropped up in the early part of the twentieth century have been further illuminated by the research of Theresa Papanikolas, Michel Sanouillet, and Richard Sonn, involving English translations of materials that were previously only available in French. Together, they offer a welcome supplement and compliment to the original edition’s groundbreaking historical article, “Surrealist Desire, Anarchy and the Poetry of Revolt”, and I am currently immersed in a research/writing project that greatly benefits from their discoveries.

In closing, I want to gratefully acknowledge *Fifth Estate*, my original publisher, for their hearty endorsement of this second edition. Though they no longer publish books, their long-running anti-authoritarian magazine continues to flourish despite increasingly hard times for print publications. Thankfully, rather than allowing the book to go out of print, Aragorn! and Leona of Ardent Press enthusiastically came to its rescue with this expanded second edition. It includes two new articles which appear in book form for the first time: the autobiographical piece, “My Life in the Academic Gulag,” which originally surfaced in *Modern Slavery* #1 (2012) in unedited form as part of a longer interview, and, “Occupying the Citadels of the Mind,” which initially found its way to the printed page in *Fifth Estate* (Winter, 2013). I would also like to offer an appreciative nod to my former collaborator in this book project, Andy Smith, for his generous assistance in facilitating the transition from one edition to the next. At his personal request, the original preface and all other material involving his once and former incarnation as Anu Bonobo has been removed from the new edition, but not from the history of anarchist publishing.

Those familiar with the original edition will notice a variety of stylistic changes in layout and design that enhance what was already a lively combination of art and letters. With these changes in mind, we hereby bust out a sonarchic drum roll saluting Jesse Gentes of the Inner Island Surrealist Group, whose front cover collage graced the original volume and now holds an honored place within its pages in black and white. Last but not least, an editorial tip of the hat to Penelope Rosemont, who graciously allowed us to feature her sensuously subversive artwork on the new front cover. Like an elegantly tiled Tunisian doorway opening at the first light of dawn to the dizzying realms of the impossible, it visually distinguishes the present volume from its predecessor and invites the reader to the verdant crossroads of anarchy and surrealism.

Ron Sakolsky  
Sla-dai-aich  
May, 2013





—Clifford Harper



# Introduction

**A**s I compose this introduction in the Summer of 2005, war rages in the world. The Eagle's talons drip with blood. The vice closes. We resist, and in building the momentum of that resistance, we simultaneously engage in a battle to defend the imagination.

The forces of fear target writers who cry out against the slaughter as traitors. "Pull out their tongues, they talk too much." Those who expose the cynical game of democracy/hypocrisy being played by the vampires in the White House become the enemy. "Claw their eyes out, they see too much." The police state brutalizes protesters and other "undesirables." "Lock them up, they *are* too much."

The witch-hunt has begun in earnest. A renewed McCarthyism rears its ugly head once again, only now the bogeyman of "Terrorism" replaces "Communism" in the mindless chants of the bloodthirsty. The media are "embedded" (in bed dead). The enforcers of "reality" seek to recuperate our desires and colonize our dreams. As the dark cloud of the clampdown passes over the sun, competing apocalyptic visions of "the rapture" or "the rupture" fill the twilight sky. Night falls. Deep in the woods of British Columbia, I howl at the moon . . .

It is in this context of burgeoning societal malaise that the book before you has taken shape. These essays, all written since the turn of the century, have been defiantly fashioned as stakes to be driven into the heart of the authoritarian culture of death or as spanners waiting to be inserted in the gears of "snivilization."

Since the publishers of my previous anthologies of radical communiques are now themselves under attack by right-wing zealots, perhaps that's an appropriate place to begin this story. A classic smear campaign tactic, "guilt by association" vilifies dissident ideas that are potentially attractive. So I will begin this book by saying how pleased I am to have been associated in the past with the two now embattled independent publishers—Autonomedia and AK Press—that have aroused the wrath of the powerful with their subversive publications.

In early 2005 (because of comments concerning 9/11 made years earlier), University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill became

the whipping boy for right wing vilification of all that was suspect in American universities.

In “Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens,” Churchill invoked Malcolm X’s comments immediately following the assassination of president John F. Kennedy as he maintained that an imperialistic American foreign policy provoked the attacks on New York. At root in the controversy was Churchill’s comparison of Americans to the “good Germans” of Nazi Germany—and his now famous phrase about “the little Eichmanns inhabiting the sterile sanctuary of the twin towers” being the “technocrats of empire.”

AK Press became embroiled in the controversy for being the publisher of his book, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of US Imperial Arrogance and Criminality*. Since AK is also the publisher of one of my books, *Seizing The Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook* (co-edited with Stephen Dunifer), I soon realized that I too was implicated in the Churchill bloodletting by default. It was not just Churchill that was being attacked, but all radical authors, independent publishers, and distributors as well, whether affiliated with universities or not.

Events took a very strange turn in February of 2005, when the contents of a seven year old article I had co-written with another Sangamon State University (SSU) faculty member, Dennis Fox, entitled, “From ‘Radical’ University To Handmaiden of the Corporate State,” (*Radical Teacher* #53, 1998), were appropriated to make the university a target for potshots by right-wing talk show hosts and bloggers across the United States. The connection between Ward Churchill and the article in question was, until recently, a little known chapter in the history of alternative higher education in North America. SSU in Springfield, Illinois, is Ward Churchill’s alma mater, where I once taught during the time he was a student for a Masters Degree.

In an attempt to discredit Churchill for Patriot Act era “thought crimes,” not only were his Malcolmesque remarks being sandbagged and his “Indian-ness” being questioned, he was being charged with having a “fake degree” from a “fake university.” Sangamon State University was suddenly and reluctantly thrust into the limelight. As the saying goes in Springfield: If you’re conservative, you are considered normal; if you’re liberal, you are reviled as a radical; and, if you’re radical, you are dismissed as crazy. Having now conveniently changed its name to the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS), and having sanitized its image, the college has clearly been trying to distance itself from any radical residue from its

liberal past for years. Whereas once they might have invited Churchill to be the keynote speaker at their “alternative graduation” ceremonies, now the gatekeepers at the former SSU, aghast at having any association with him at all, have had to confront and defend their own history while, at the same time, disassociating themselves from him in no uncertain terms.

In this regard, the university’s spin doctors seem to have decided that the best strategy was to claim that the university was never radical in any way, except for a few crazies like Ward Churchill or . . . Ron Sakolsky.

While not wanting to conflate the gravity of the attack on Churchill with my own much more minor skirmishes with a local outlet of the corporate press, the ensuing brouhaha illustrates the ripple effect that attempted purges of well known radical scholars can have on the political climate of campuses around the country. Joining the chorus of reactionary voices who pillaged the contents of the *Radical Teacher* article in order to invent a stereotypical straw man to assail in their relentless pursuit of Churchill was the local Copley Press-affiliated newspaper in Springfield, Illinois, the *State Journal Register* (*SJR*). The *Radical Teacher* article never claimed that a state institution like SSU was radical, much less anarchist. In fact, in the article’s title, we put the word *Radical* in quotes. Institutional support for radical initiatives was never something that we counted upon, and, even if achieved, it was usually only temporary. However, SSU’s once innovative approach to learning allowed for the formation of a radical enclave within its midst because its experimental nature attracted some exciting faculty and students.

As we noted in the article, in explanation of SSU’s virtues:

Many students were not graded but received individualized evaluations instead. There were no large classes. No deans or department chairs—in fact, no departments. Interdisciplinary courses were the norm. Faculty were hired for their interest in teaching—without teaching assistants—and had no “publish-or-perish” requirement. SSU was designated ‘the public affairs university of Illinois’ at a time when public affairs, for many of the faculty at least, meant opposing the war in Vietnam and devising alternatives to mainstream institutions . . . Although the faculty as a whole is more mainstream these days, there is still a small and beleaguered core of Marxists and anarchists and environmentalists, anti-racists and feminists among the 157 faculty members some of whom even take their radical perspectives out of the classroom and into the streets.

Not surprisingly, instead of quoting this description, the *SJR* mentioned the article by name but parroted the disinformation that was being circulated on the internet. In their typical yellow journalism style, they printed the website diatribes against Churchill which characterized SSU as “designed to create a convergence of Marxists and anarchists,” “some sort of hippie college,” “a complete joke as a school,” “organized in the 70s to provide cover for protests against the Vietnam War,” “a counter-cultural (no culture) institution (mental?)” and “some sort of hippy-dippy, ‘no grades or rules or sellin’-out to the Man’ type of experimental college... Evidently somebody from the legislature finally visited the place and that resulted in it being taken over by real professors.” The newspaper then proceeded to say that this caricature of SSU was inaccurate, except for a few radical troublemakers like me.

Now *I* was being maligned along with Churchill as part of an ongoing conservative campaign aimed at the rollback of even the most piddling educational reforms (that were never enough in the first place from a radical perspective). It seems that my part in this sordid soap opera was to be the ghost of SSU’s past that had come back to haunt them in spite of their new identity as UIS. In 1989, I had been arrested for (ironically) “breaching the peace” while involved in a street theater action dressed as Uncle Sam outside of a military recruitment station in Springfield during a day of peace demonstrations protesting against the US military presence in Central America. After dredging up this incident in “oh-my-god” fashion, the *SJR* then proceeded to make me the fall guy for all the bad publicity that the college was receiving, perhaps thinking that since I had not lived there for two and a half years, I would not hear of it and could not defend myself. Referring to me, the author of the article Dave Bakke concluded, “Bloggers are correct that there was *that element* (italics mine) to the school at the time.”

Bakke was essentially doing damage control for UIS. His goal was not investigative journalism, but public relations. Nowhere in the article is there any in-depth analysis of Churchill’s controversial post-911 statements about the World Trade Center and its Eichman-like bureaucratic apparatus or any attempt to examine his own lengthy public defense of himself which can also be found on the internet along with all of the hysterical rants of right-wing bloggers which Bakke did make sure to include in the article. In the shrill climate of political repression in the US, Churchill was summarily being judged to be a dangerous character, perhaps even a terrorist, a pariah who refuses to get with the new cor-

porate university program. Perhaps the heat Churchill and others have drawn as radical professors is related to the fact that we have steadfastly refused to confine our heresies to the classroom, reaching beyond the usual ivory tower academic circles in our writing. And we have not been afraid to take to the streets to act upon our principles (in Churchill's case, his arrest at the 2004 Anti-Columbus Day march in Denver).

While the streets of Springfield may remain deserted, they are very much alive with dissent elsewhere since the radical coming out party known as the Battle of Seattle. In October 1999, a year after *Seizing The Airwaves* was published by AK, I was asked to speak on free radio at a national conference sponsored by the Union for Democratic Communications (UDC) in Eugene, Oregon. Arriving in Portland, I found that I was just in time to catch John Zerzan's talk at the Reading Frenzy bookstore, and then give him a lift back to Eugene that evening. During the drive that night, we talked all the way there about the free radio station in Eugene where John had an anarchy show and discussed his take on the unfolding plans for the upcoming WTO protests in Seattle that November. We both realized that Seattle was going to be big, though we weren't sure if it would really shut down the WTO.

After sleeping on John's floor that night, I spoke at the UDC conference the next day not only about free radio, but about preparations for Seattle, and my excitement about the prospect of an upcoming meeting which I was to have with some folks in Seattle from a fledgling organization called Indymedia. I was to travel there later in the week to do a radio interview for Indymedia on the *Seizing* book, and another, for a future video called "Pirate Radio USA." Both interviews took place at the brand new Indymedia Center which was in the process of being set up for coverage of the WTO the following month. Aside from some portable audio taping equipment to be used for the interview, the place was bare bones—even the computers were not scheduled to arrive until that evening. After the interview, we talked about plans to set up the Indymedia Center in the context of making a free radio presence part of the overall design. I mention this point because what seems to be lost in most discussions about the history of Indymedia is its original connection to the free radio movement both as a source of inspiration and as a model in relation to technical ideas for networking. We spoke about how my *Seizing* co-editor Stephen Dunifer of Free Radio Berkeley would be coming up from California to set up a free radio station at the Independent Media Center, with web streaming capabilities so as to send live audio coverage of the

WTO demonstration throughout the world. As the dawn of the new century broke over Seattle, it's not all that far fetched to say that one of the more anarchist models which influenced the budding media activism of the Indymedia Center was the free radio movement.

A new era of electronic rebellion had surfaced, with the IMC at the tip of the iceberg, and that computer and internet focused uprising has been wholeheartedly embraced by Autonomedia, the publisher of my other three books. Autonomedia also publishes books by The Critical Arts Ensemble (including *The Electronic Disturbance*; *The Flesh Machine: Cyborgs*, *Designer Babies*, and *New Eugenic Consciousness*; *Digital Resistance*; and *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas*). Like AK, Autonomedia has lately been subjected to government scrutiny as the purveyor of the radical ideas found in these books and others in their catalog. Unlike AK, in 2004, they were dragged into a court case against one of their authors, Steve Kurtz of the aforementioned Critical Arts Ensemble. Kurtz, an art professor at the University of Buffalo, had been labeled a bioterrorist by members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force in a strange case of police harassment that was ultimately aimed at having a chilling effect on art activism and critical scholarship by politically-engaged intellectuals. Though labeled as terrorists, the Critical Arts Ensemble (CAE) consider themselves to be an artists' collective that seeks to educate the public about the politics of biotechnology.

In the Kurtz case, the three artists of CAE (Kurtz, Beatriz da Costa, and Steve Barnes) have been accused of bioterrorism under the 1989 US Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act, which has been expanded by the more recent USA Patriot Act. Kurtz was arrested after he was discovered to be in possession of simple biology equipment to be used in a CAE project. This equipment was called a "biological terrorism laboratory" by the feds who clearly cannot (or choose not to) distinguish between art and terrorism.

The circumstances in which this biology equipment was discovered by the cops were even more bizarre. On May 11, 2004, Kurtz awoke to find his wife, Hope, dead of cardiac arrest. Kurtz phoned 911 for emergency assistance (yet another 911 story). When the police arrived, they stumbled across the test tubes and petri dishes that were part of Kurtz's artwork and called the Joint Terrorism Task Force, who, along with the FBI, detained him, cordoned off the entire block around his house, and later impounded his computers, manuscripts, books, equipment, and even his wife's body for further analysis. Autonomedia, as the publisher

of three of his books, was called into court and had their computer files and records subpoenaed.

Make no mistake, when ideas that are published in books are subject to a government harassment operation of this nature, the storm troopers have already arrived. Welcome to America, 2005: where it's a "crime" to even think of not loving Big Brother! And to embrace the "Non-Serviam" motto of my latest publishers Fifth Estate Books is a blasphemy of the highest order.

Back in the Summer of 2002, I left the States to live on Denman Island in British Columbia (I recount that story in one of the articles in this book, "Black Star North"). A curious thing happened to me last year when I moved from one residence to another on Denman. As objective chance would have it, my address was changed from the old listing to the new one of A—4062 Wren Road at the insistence of the island post person. Not only did I have to place a big honkin' A in front of my address, but I was expected to circle it. It seems there's a B—4062 Wren Road address adjacent to my digs, and the postal authorities needed to easily distinguish one from the other. Of course, the irony of the Canadian government requiring me to put a Circle A before my numbered street address did not escape me. The post office actually reprimands me if my correspondents don't use the A or, even more to the point, don't circle it according to postal protocol.

My own father worked as a New York City postal employee his whole life to make ends meet, with a short stint as a union agitator. Now his son's anarchist affinities are being recognized, even memorialized, by the post office in address form. What can I say? Since there is presently no stigma attached to having to wear a Circle A on my postal forehead, I've come to more fully appreciate this peculiar correspondence (pun intended) in the poetic light of surrealism.

—Denman Island  
August 2005







—exquisite corpse by Destanne Lundquist & Jesse Gentes

# Teaching Anarchy

Why are there so few anarchists in the academy? It's that anarchism is primarily concerned with forms of practice; it insists, before anything else, that one's means must be consonant with one's ends; one cannot create freedom through authoritarian means; in fact, as much as possible, one must oneself, in one's relations with one's friends and allies, embody the society one wishes to create. This does not square very well with operating within the university, doing intellectual battle at conferences in expensive hotels, and trying to pretend all this somehow furthers revolution. At the very least, one would imagine being an openly anarchist professor would mean challenging the way universities are run—and I don't mean by demanding an anarchist studies department, either—and that, of course, is going to get one in far more trouble than anything one could ever write.

—David Graeber,  
*Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*,  
2004

From freeschooling to homeschooling to deschooling and beyond, anarchist approaches to education abound. The experience recounted here occurred in a learning environment less receptive than these. For twenty years, I taught a course entitled “Anarchy and Social Change.” I worked at a university that was at first fairly experimental

(student-centered, no grades, interdisciplinary, participatory decision-making and self-designed degrees), but which, over the years, deteriorated (though not without a battle) into the “anywhere USA” franchise of bureaucratic education that is so widespread today. By the time I left teaching there, I was alone in my refusal to adopt the conventional techniques of academic discipline now prevalent elsewhere at the university. However, as a result of a growing corporate climate, I could not as easily create an anarchist-learning experience as had once been possible.

Moreover, the nature of the student body had shifted because the university no longer attracted free spirited radicals. Even beyond the classroom, student ideas for community projects increasingly tended to be of the reformist variety. Aside from the occasional student who identified with anarchy, my classes were flooded with students who did not really want to engage with anarchist ideas. They were often there simply because they had heard that there were no grades and expected an easy ride. Many of these more opportunistic students were not merely uninterested in anarchy, they were actively hostile to it. Their priorities were elsewhere, and their defenses were up whenever I introduced transgressive ideas. Other students, while somewhat curious about anarchy, were unconvinced that it was possible. “Nice idea, but anarchy can’t work in practice,” they’d say, because “people are just too fucked up.” Implied in this miserabilist analysis were a variety of unexamined assumptions about human nature that led to a “taking care of number one” stance for some or a cynical hipster pose for others.

In effect, these students told me that before they would agree to seriously engage in learning about anarchy, they needed to know that it wasn’t just pie in the sky. They wanted proof that human nature is intrinsically compatible with anarchy, or else, why waste their time. Only by recognizing this challenge as valid—and starting from there—could the learning process begin. Fair enough. We began experientially by re-imagining and redesigning both the classroom and the learning process along anarchist lines, from creating learning affinity groups to collectively deciding what to study and how to go about it, starting, of course, with human nature.

This was not easy work. Preconceived notions of human nature go deep and prevent us from learning about anarchy in more than a superficial “oh isn’t that an interesting heresy” kind of way. This ingrained problem is further compounded by the prevailing post-modernist misreading of the anarchist view of human nature as essentialist and ideological.

Yet, what is often dismissed as essentialist in anarchy is, in fact, quite nuanced. Similarly, what is rejected as ideological is frequently seen that way because of the viewer's own unexamined ideological assumptions.

Take Kropotkin... Based on his personal observations of animals surviving under the most difficult circumstances in Siberia, Kropotkin found not "survival of the fittest" in the Social Darwinist sense, but "mutual aid." His story of how species survive varies widely from what we are accustomed to hearing in capitalist society. As he speculated, like other animals, humans have within themselves the capacity for both cooperative and competitive behavior in solving problems of survival. Which of these elements comes to the fore in social interactions depends largely on the values inculcated by the larger society. However, while capitalist thinking assumes that human nature is, in essence, competitive, that is only part of the picture. Even in a capitalist setting, there is no inherently human way of taking care of survival, much less abundance.

Perhaps it is better for anarchists to think of human nature as encompassing an expansive repertoire of possible behaviors. In so doing, we can release human nature from the narrow confines of an essentialist logic that naively views it as either good or bad (or even evil as in the Judeo-Christian language of original sin). While anarchy emphasizes the potential for cooperative behavior embedded in human nature by referencing solidarity against oppression and for the creation of liberatory alternatives, it doesn't deny the will to power that the state and capitalism tap into so effectively. In this sense, the authoritarian structures of civilization are not strictly based upon imposition for their success, but are built upon human proclivities for competition and control. Precisely because we can't expect a system in which imperfect human beings are in positions of power to be free of domination, anarchists seek to abolish hierarchy.

However, while we must be vigilant about power dynamics, this does not imply that we need to accept a bleak dog-eat-dog conception of human nature. Authoritarian tendencies in human nature, while real, can be rewarded or discouraged. In turn, anti-authoritarian impulses toward cooperation never completely disappear and can be reinforced by an anarchist vision of social change. In my teaching, I used the following story as a catalyst to elicit related tales of mutual aid from my students.

Several years ago, I was in a freak accident that resulted in my van being totaled. On my drive home, I started to smell smoke. I pulled over toward the side of the road and saw that the engine was in flames. Not having a fire extinguisher at hand, I started to throw dirt on it to no

avail. As I looked up in exasperation, I saw a woman running toward me with a fire extinguisher in her hand. Another car stopped with an extinguisher, then another. Still the fire raged. A guy pulled up, jumped out of his car and started directing traffic around my van. Another called the volunteer fire department. A third helped me grab my sleeping bag, tent, camping equipment and tools out of the vehicle. A fourth offered to stick around long enough to give me a ride home. By the time the cops finally got wind of it and arrived, everything that could have been done to bring order to this chaotic situation had already been done. The arriving volunteer fire department trucks put out the blaze, and I caught a ride home with a total stranger.

In fact, all these people that I've mentioned were total strangers. Yet, they weren't helping me because they were doing their anarchist duty, or because they were being paid to do so, but because they recognized their own vulnerability in my struggle, and they acted on their most cooperative instincts. While this story doesn't have a moral, it offers us a lesson about human nature. After all, someone could have stopped, clubbed me with their tire iron, stole all of my possessions from the car, rifled my wallet, and left me for dead. Humans are capable of such things. But this didn't happen. Somehow, the people who offered their assistance to me saw their survival as connected to mine, and they were generous instead of predatory in their actions. What people will do to survive is unpredictable because there is no essential human nature determining how they will act. In fact, against all odds, in a society where people live in isolated nuclear units and competition is the norm, they were cooperative.

A different dynamic might have applied if I were a woman or a person of color, a crusty punk, obviously queer, or transgendered. By speculating on what might have happened in these situations, I was able to raise questions in the classroom about patriarchy, white supremacy, homophobia, and gender politics in a way that was directly linked to a true story rather than having it just be a theoretical exercise. In every case, these specific questions related to the larger one of discovering what might be possible in an anarchist society committed to the ideal of uprooting all forms of domination.





—Don La Coss



# Why Consent to Be Ruled at All?

*What follows was originally a radio interview (June 19, 2004) with James Booker and Ilan Goldenblatt of CHLY's "Elephant Talk," a community station in Nanaimo, BC, during which I offer an anarchist perspective on electoral politics on the eve of a Canadian federal election and a few months before Dubya's re-(s)election in the States.*

**Ilan:** Is it better not to go and vote or is it better to go and spoil a ballot? When you don't go and vote, you're just bunched in with all those people who don't care, who are apathetic and can't be bothered to go out and vote. If we got 5 million spoiled ballots instead of 5 million people who weren't voting, wouldn't that carry more weight?

**Ron:** Why not first ask ourselves if the only way to be politically active is either to vote or spoil a ballot? I think there are lots of ways in which we can wield political weight. You were talking on air earlier about tree-sitting in BC and the people doing forest defense. People are active in the streets in relation to corporate globalization issues. I find it interesting that one of the reasons that massive demonstrations didn't really happen at the recent G8 summit in the States is that—aside from the fact that it was in a remote location [the Georgia Sea Islands]—*strategically* a lot of people in the States said, "Let's save it for the Republican Convention in August. Let's not get ourselves arrested before that. Let's turn this manufactured electoral spectacle to our advantage." Electoral protest trumped anti-globalization protest.

Of course, when people withhold their consent by not voting, it doesn't have to be done in a secretive kind of way. We can talk about, and make noise about, why we are refusing to go along. Everybody knows that it's humiliating to be ruled, but, from an anarchist point of view, it's even more humiliating to have to choose your rulers. So the idea of holding your nose and voting is unappealing. The idea that you're talking about, the strategy of spoiling a ballot, has some merit to it as well. It's just one

of many ways in which people can refuse to consent. Yet, it is always useful to question the programming by which we are encouraged to save all of our political activity—even protests—for the media spectacle of the electoral feeding frenzy.

**James:** I've been told over and over again, "If you want to change something, don't *complain* about things unless you vote."

**Ilan:** In fact today, this very morning, I was told, "If you don't go out and vote, I don't ever want to hear you talking politics again." And I said, "Wait a minute, you're saying all that politics is about is going out once every four years and voting?"

**Ron:** That attitude equates politics and electoral politics, which is just one form of political activity. The equation of the two is part of the illusion that's being created, as is the confusion between representative democracy and direct democracy and their relation to anarchy. Voting for representatives by majority rule—or even by using a system of proportional representation which relegates minority viewpoints to the horsetrading of parliamentary realpolitricks—are both circumscribed forms of controlled participation that *co-opt* the potential for *unbridled* direct action in the streets and forests. Direct democracy still involves the rule of the majority even without the mediation of representatives. Anarchy, on the other hand, is the "rule of all" which can be accomplished, formally or informally, by seeking a consensus rather than voting. Voting, then, is a way of recuperating political activity so as to prevent it from spilling over into something too *unruly* that might actually challenge power relationships.

**James:** Or might even change something.

**Ilan:** I feel that if we did have everybody that doesn't go out and vote, going and spoiling their ballot, that would be a huge push for all the people who are sitting alone in their rooms, and saying, "It doesn't work and why can't anybody see it."

**Ron:** Well, there's also the possibility that, however anti-authoritarian the intention, ballot spoiling could still be interpreted as reformist. What's to prevent people from thinking, "The reason they're not voting is because the candidates are not to their liking, and therefore, they're spoiling their ballots." Certainly a lot of people feel that way. We're asked which millionaire should rule us or which corporate "bought and paid for" politician should control our lives. But anarchists question the entire edifice of the electoral system, rather than just the choice of candidates.

The answer to our problems is not simply to have one party in power rather than another or to have better candidates to elect.

**James:** I've never really seen a huge difference in the way things are done no matter who is ruling me. So, in Canada for the last couple of decades, things have changed slightly, and you get one party in that's a little kinder to the unions, and you get another party in that's a little kinder to the corporations, but for the most part, life continues.

**Ilan:** There are small differences, but I always look at it like band-aids on cancer.

**Ron:** I think all the candidates agree on the basics—the corporate state, capitalism, global domination, empire, industrial civilization, and the megamachine. All that stuff is just *assumed*, any further discussions are about the details. And, of course, candidates will tell people what they want to hear in order to get elected. It's all a carefully staged spectacle. There's absolutely no guarantee that what a politician promises will actually be enacted or that, once elected, politicians will even attempt to keep their campaign promises.

**James:** There's more guarantee of the opposite in fact.

**Ron:** Electoral politics is increasingly about marketing and how to sell yourself to the voters. It's about which brand are you going to choose in the electoral supermarket in an age of pre-packaged politics.

**Ilan:** The reality today is actually that electoral campaign politics tell you very little. Politicians don't actually tell you anymore what they're going to do, all they're telling you is what their *opponent's* going to do. Politicians don't even make promises anymore.

**James:** And how many of those politicians could change anything anyway given the amount of bureaucracy and political hoops that have been created over the years to stop good ideas from becoming law.

**Ron:** Well, I must make an admission here. I actually have voted in an election—*once*. I'm originally from the States, and it was the first time I was ever eligible to vote for president. I was nineteen. It was in 1964 (we're talking 40 years ago). I did not yet think of myself as an anarchist. At that time, Lyndon Baines Johnson was running against Barry Goldwater as the "peace" candidate. I voted for him to end the Vietnam war, reluctantly embracing the left liberal slogan of the time: "Half the Way with LBJ" (a parody of the Democratic party's campaign slogan of "All the Way with LBJ"). I held my nose and voted, just as people are

being asked to do today in relation to Bush. As you know, of course, Johnson went on to escalate the war and became the most hawkish of demagogues. So, I learned my lesson. It was a no-brainer. Okay, I get it . . . no need to bother with the electoral charade.

**James:** Another of the arguments that has been made to me is, “If we don’t vote, that’s when the fascists take over.” How would you respond to that?

**Ron:** Well, first of all, the idea of fascism has a particular kind of connotation which usually involves images of Hitler, and storm troopers, and so on—

**Ilan:** —The fascists are *here!*—

**Ron:** Yes, there’s a creeping fascism that is pervasive right now within the realm of electoral politics. Even in the case of Hitler, remember that he was elected to office.

**James:** Well, I too would suggest that the fascists are here, but I think the idea in the statement, “If you don’t vote, the fascists will take over,” is that since the right wing will always vote, if you don’t vote, you’re going to get the most reactionary, corporate-controlled government that there is, and therefore, you should vote to prevent that from happening. Again, it’s like the lesser of the two evils—

**Ron:** Lately, it’s the evil of the two lessers. Even with the lesser of the two evils though, you’re still left with evil. Nothing seems to change. There goes the old boss, here comes the new boss. Candidates are pretty lackluster, but the whole system really needs to be questioned. How does it get to the point that anti-war voters end up being asked to pull the donkey lever for candidates like Kerry, who—

**Ilan:** Skull and Bones—

**Ron:** —essentially supports the war in Iraq, voted to send troops there, and has come out in favor of unilateral pre-emptive strikes by the United States anywhere in the world. So, if you’re voting for [Kerry] to avoid that kind of thing in terms of foreign policy, to avoid another Iraq quagmire, then it’s not really going to do the trick. Instead, it is the voter who is being tricked in much the same way that I was in ‘64 when I voted for LBJ.

**Ilan:** So the question arises, and this is the question that always comes up, if not this then what?

**Ron:** ...Anarchy of course.

**Ilan:** Let’s define anarchy.

(Ron chuckles)

**James:** I want to offer you what I guess is a typical dictionary definition of anarchy: “one, absence of government; the state of society where there is no law or supreme power; a state of lawlessness; political confusion.”

And then there’s another, “a utopian society of individuals who enjoy complete freedom without government; want of government; a state of society when there is no law or supreme power, or when the laws are not efficient and individuals do what they please with impunity; political confusion,” and I’ll throw in another, “chaos.” Is that anarchy?

**Ron:** These standard dictionary definitions include a lot of what I would say are popular *connotations* of the word anarchy. To someone raised in an authoritarian society, anarchy must seem like chaos, since it seeks to overthrow all the forms of domination that hierarchical society is predicated upon. My own definition is that anarchy basically has two main principles attached to it in both its philosophy and practice. One of them is mutual aid, the idea of cooperation and community, and the other is individual freedom, the idea of liberty. I realize, of course, that community and individuality can come into conflict with one another. Hopefully, this conflict will produce a creative tension, so that something more positive will emerge from the dynamics of the process because of its participatory nature and its respect for individuality. Anarchy is very different to me than the system of representative democracy upon which elections are based because it is both direct in form and radical in its demands.

**Ilan:** So this would be governance at a communal level?

**Ron:** I basically think that any government, no matter how communal, has to be questioned. The whole idea that we need to be governed is something that anarchists reject. Instead, we seek *self-rule*—the idea that people can be self-determining; the idea that things can be done in a way that is autonomous of government and corporate control. So, it’s not just about ending government. The conservatives say, “We need to down-size government.” But what they don’t say is that they don’t want to touch the corporations or those parts of the governance machinery (like the Department of Defense in the US) that serve the purposes of empire. As an anarchist, I see *both* governmental and corporate rule as problematic, and they *both* have to go. To eliminate one and not the other does not put an end to domination.

**Ilan:** Now anarchy—in my mind—could only work if it was a global movement. If we here in Canada got to a point where most Canadians wanted to live in a state of cooperative and free anarchy, it would be really easy for the US to just march on in and take over. What would you think about that?

**James:** You're assuming that they would...really take notice, and that they would—I mean if a small group on one of our small islands here in BC—

**Ron:** Well, I think that US capital has already marched in under the guise of the Free Trade Agreement. Yet, even in the face of global capitalist expansion, there are traces of anarchy in commonplace activities that people are involved in right at this moment, though they may not be thought of as such, and the people involved in them might not consider themselves to be anarchists. When people get together and do a volunteer fire department—on an island or anywhere else—that's essentially a way of taking care of a particular need without government or corporations. When people get together to do a barn raising or have a potluck or put together a community garden or free radio station, those are all related to anarchy. To me, that's the direction in which we need to be headed.

Anarchy is a way of understanding where we need to go, even if we're never going to fully get there. There are always going to be issues of domination that arise in any social situation, even one aspiring to anarchy, and the related problems must be addressed rather than ignored. This conception is very different than the idea that a revolution is a cataclysmic event that happens one day, and then the next day everything is permanently changed. Instead, I see revolution as a process that is constantly unfolding. Therefore, we must continue to be vigilant due to the persistence of remnants of authoritarian attitudes and forms which may come to the surface even in potentially liberating moments of systemic collapse or radical transformation.

You mentioned the term *utopia* in your definition, James. Utopia is usually thought of as a pre-existing blueprint, but for me, any kind of utopian vision that I'm comfortable with as an anarchist has to be more open-ended. Oscar Wilde once said, "A map of the world that doesn't include utopia isn't even worth glancing at." And I think what he was getting at there is that utopia is a destination. The question then is, what would it take for us to begin to realize our dreams of a society without coercion, and how can we move things more in that direction right now.

**James:** Utopia is also offered up as the dream of the idealist, and that's another argument I was presented with, very dismissive and not a good argument, but basically, "You're just a dreamer and this is just idealism, and there's no way that's going to work." Seems like a circular argument to me.

**Ron:** Well, often it's an argument that's centered around the "survival of the fittest" idea of human nature posited by the Social Darwinists. Yet, Kropotkin, an anarchist, studied the survival of various species in very difficult circumstances in Siberia and found not a competitive dog-eat-dog situation, but what he called "mutual aid." In other words, a species survived not because of internal competition but because its members were able to cooperate with one another.

**James:** Yeah, that's one of the earmarks of humanity, I think, one of the necessary parts of our recipe for society is that if we don't cooperate, we die.

**Ron:** Exactly, I think that's very true.

**Ilan:** And that's only going to get truer as the environment starts falling apart around us.

**Ron:** Right. In terms of the dreamer label, for an anarchist, dreaming of a better world goes hand in hand with attempting to realize that dream. In recent years, anarchists have been active, as you both know very well, in the global liberation movement and so on. We haven't just been dreaming. We've been organizing in affinity groups and doing direct action. These are oppositional modes in which people can effectively work together which are consistent with anarchist ideals. Instead of being a group of people who form a vanguard and try to operate in an authoritarian way to organize the masses, anarchists tend to look for the passion that attracts people to one another and make those the basis for solidarity. Part of that approach is about decentralization. While global connections between people all over the world who are involved in related anarchist activities are very important, a decentralized approach is the essence of anarchy in practice, whether in fomenting insurrection or in building community.

One of the things that people today find most alienating is the increasing loss of community. Our sense of community has constantly been eroded so that things that used to be provided *by* us, in cooperative kinds of arrangements, are now provided *for* us by the twin engines of centralized government and consumer capitalism. Our resulting dependence on the state and the corporate marketplace involves a profound shift.



Some of the people that “buy into” the idea of voting and government might say, “Yeah, well, sure government sucks, but we want to save the health care system.” Certainly, we all should be able to have our health care needs met, but the underlying idea of state benevolence is misleading. Health care is something the state *offers* you as sort of a trade off for all the things which they do that you might not be so happy with, like making war. And this arrangement is even more insidious in that it erodes the idea that we can care for one another, that we can take care of our neighbors, and it replaces it with an impersonal, bureaucratic way of solving individual and social problems.

**James:** It’s almost like a type of addiction: the government provides things for us that we in the end come to believe we cannot provide for ourselves, and then we rely on the government, and then we get into a situation where . . . where we are now.

**Ron:** Right, and I’m not suggesting we “privatize” health care by turning it over to the corporations either, but that we question the way the enticements of the welfare state are related to giving up control over our lives in other areas, to the erosion of community, and to the degradation of our own sense of self-worth.

**Ilan:** Yeah, of course. Using the example of indigenous people, historically the human race used to be able to take care of all of its needs in the community. We have lost that ability over time. Along comes government, telling us, “No, you gotta stop doing that, you gotta specialize. And you only need to know how to screw this screw into the machine, but you don’t need to know anything else about how the machine works. We’re going to take care of your health care and of your elders.” Then, once they get us hooked on believing that these things are inevitable, they start draining the funds, chipping them away, but still telling us, “This is the best that you can do.”

**Ron:** Many indigenous societies emphasize a very different kind of economy than either corporate or state capitalism, or even barter. It is one based on mutual aid, reciprocity, and the gift relationship. The division of labor whereby each person has a detailed specialization is directly connected to industrialism. The relationship between work and simple technological innovation is very different in societies that are organized around different kinds of goals than those of the industrial state. A first hand account by Pierre Clastres that I find very instructive in this regard was made during the time that he witnessed the introduction of metal

axes into the culture of the Amazonian indigenous groups in Paraguay and Venezuela with whom he lived in the Sixties. It is entitled *Society Against the State*. Previously, they had used stone axes, and they were offered metal axes as a result of contact with the outside world. As the metal axes started to appear, people became curious about them. They didn't reject them. They implicitly said, "We could use these metal axes, they'll help us do our work more quickly, and then, we'll have more time for pleasure, more time for leisure, more time for play." In other words, they wouldn't have to spend the same number of hours at work as they had previously done in order to insure their survival. Why work as hard as before to produce more than they actually needed or to create a surplus that had to be guarded? Consequently, they used those metal axes in a very different kind of way than is the case with work done under the mental and physical yoke of wage slavery because their values were not industrial. We might even say that they were "anti-industrial" to distinguish them from the misleading evolutionary label "pre-industrial," which assumes a linear notion of progress towards industrial development.

Maybe, those of us living in the industrialized world can learn from the refusals of "uncivilized" peoples who are often viewed by politicians as an anachronism, disrespectfully scapegoated, or dismissed in the most negative terms by those who are running for electoral office, or else only seen as interest groups to co-opt or placate. Once we begin to look beyond the façade of electoral politics for collective solutions to our problems, we can recognize our pressing need to decolonize our minds and inspire each other in our active resistance to, and rejection of, the social, political, and economic institutions that underlie the power and authority of the nation-state. In this way, we can create fertile ground for planting the seeds of anarchy.





—Ron Sakolsky

# Liberty Shield

Liberty shield?  
Liberty?  
Shield?  
No Liberty  
without  
shields?

Liberate me  
from shields  
that  
shield me  
in the name of  
liberty.

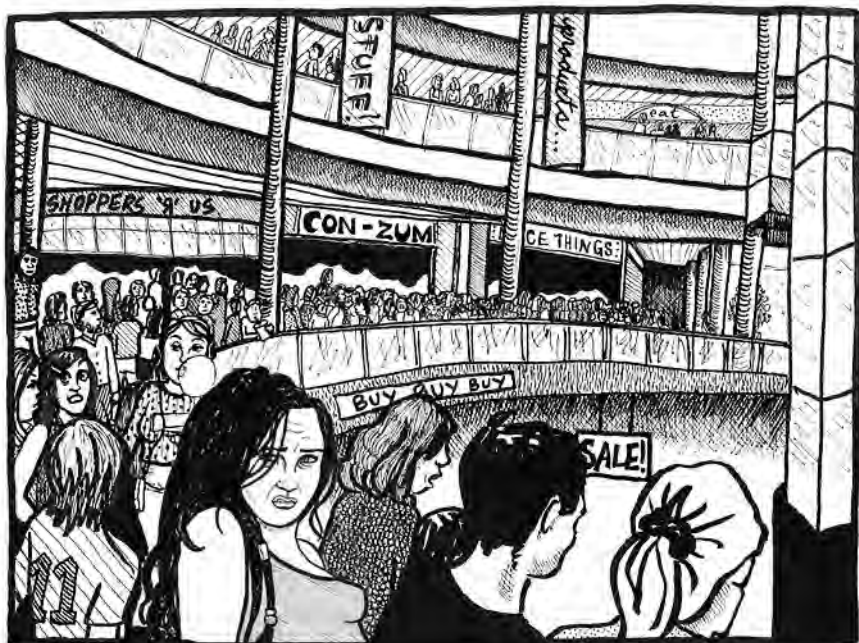
In fact,  
forget it!  
I'll liberate  
myself  
from your shield  
and shield  
myself  
from your  
liberty.

Your liberty  
is not  
my  
Liberty.

Your liberty  
shields  
you  
from my  
Liberty.

So  
I take  
the liberty  
to tell you  
to take  
your shield  
and  
shove  
it  
up  
your  
unliberated  
ass!

\* This poem is directed at the US Department of Homeland Security's "Operation Liberty Shield" program initiated in conjunction with the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. It originally saw the light of day at the Anarchist Book Fair in San Francisco, April 2003, and was read again in June of 2003 at "The Word in Ruigoord" poetry festival in Amsterdam.



—Julie Chadwick

## Refusing the Marketplace

Lady  
with the very modern illness  
agoraphobia  
but ancient as fear  
in a Greek marketplace  
Lady  
I have seen your face  
crumple and break in ecstasy  
of terror of horror of being  
alive in the sewer world  
feeling alien thoughts beating  
at your mind an office desk  
protruding from one ear  
a subway train from the other  
bells clanging gongs shouting  
while you're washing the dishes  
terror  
of the market place  
and falling  
falling into that white place  
without shadows  
where the rivers are milk  
and Lethe dreams  
and nothingness has no horizon...

—Al Purdy,  
“The Stone Bird,”  
in *To Paris Never Again*, 1997



The Oxford dictionary terms “agoraphobia” as “a morbid dislike of public places.” This definition stems from the Greek word “agora” which is “an assembly, hence the place of assembly, especially the marketplace.” In the one world of global capitalism, where the marketplace has increasingly swallowed what used to be public space and the commons has been devoured by the mall, agoraphobia needs to be redefined.

Is it “morbid” to feel anxiety in a situation where public places are fast becoming privatized? While not wanting to romanticize the agony associated with those suffering from agoraphobia, by flipping the script, we can see that it is really the relationship between the marketplace and the public sphere that is morbid—not the adverse reaction of the individual who is repelled by it. Personal trauma associated with such an insidious relationship should not be simplistically dismissed as “mental illness.” Rather, what is labeled as “psychosomatic” malaise in this respect is not merely a case of mind over matter—but is rooted in our dis-ease at the increasing usurpation of the public domain by the marketplace and the corresponding acceleration of street surveillance to protect this expansion of private property.

These days, not to be deeply troubled by such a toxic confluence of the marketplace and public space is to be comatose. What is truly morbid is to numb the awareness of our fears with a passivity-inducing diet of anti-depressants, computer game tidbits, “reality” television morsels, and Clear Channel sound bites—all of which are conveniently provided for our consumption by the market itself. Together, they serve to screen out or allay those fears of the marketplace considered to be abnormal and triumphantly proclaim the normality of a life predicated upon hierarchy, competition, and the unequal distribution of power and wealth.

The mediated market encourages us to voyeuristically watch a growing array of dog-eat-dog survival shows that contrast sharply with the boredom of our daily work rut and leisure time passivity. Makeover shows that exploit our body image insecurities prey upon us and remind us that our physical imperfections can be masked or surgically eliminated for a price. As an ego boost, we can conveniently turn on Jerry Springer to allow us to feel superior to the-oh-so-tacky losers who are his guests. And, along with the cheesy competitors on American Idol, we are enticed to vicariously dream of being stars with enough fame and fortune to purchase anything we want. Though this manipulative media landscape and the capitalist marketplace that spawns it are



social constructions which can be dismantled, they are assumed to be permanent givens by the rulebook of consensus reality. Even if, while consuming this programming, a mysterious fear should well up in us, we have been conditioned not to blame the market. The officially prescribed remedy is to turn on the TV and increase the dosage of consumption.

Increasingly then, we find that both our psychic well-being and our individual identities have become synonymous with market demographics. Is it any accident that in a televised speech Dubya urged troubled Americans to go shopping when faced with the horrors of 9-11? Not only does hyper-consumption fuel the economy, but the media markets our fears back to us in the form of frightening images of appallingly evil foreign terrorists who are said to be jealous of our high consumption lifestyle and anti-corporate globalization protesters who are seen as so disdainful of our affluent position in the world that they are as bad as terrorists themselves. In this politically self-serving scenario, freedom equals consumer choice. Likewise, the spin-doctors divert our curiosity about why the imperial chickens came home to roost at the World Trade Center into fleeting thoughts of Kentucky Fried Chicken dinners to be eaten while avidly watching the spectacle of competitive sports, rooting for “our” side in Iraq on the 6:00 news, or vacantly imbibing MTV’s seductive non-stop commercial for music industry product.

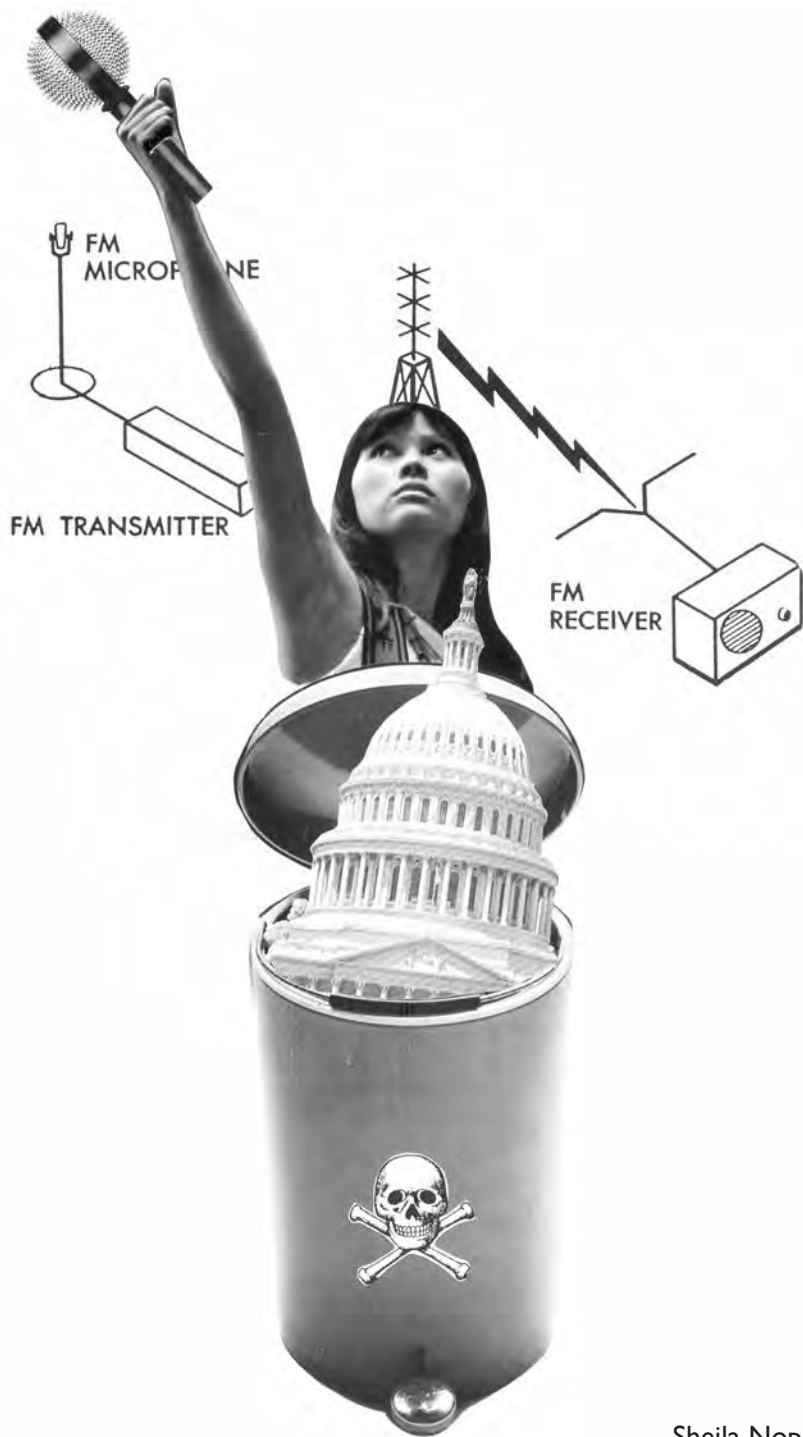
Of course, if we’re too afraid to step outside of doors to go shopping at a time when even cellphones have become cameras, then we can just log on to E-bay or turn on the shopping channel and bring the unadulterated realm of the marketplace directly into our house where it seems so warm and fuzzy emanating from the home entertainment system in our living room. Or better yet, check it out on the screen in our bedroom, where the marketplace snuggles up to us, colonizes our dreams with disposable products, and sexualizes our consumer fantasies. In this manner, our consciousness is saturated not only with the hype that surrounds individual products but with the assumed inevitability of the capitalist economy as our most intimate environs are absorbed into the burgeoning space of the marketplace. To this home invasion, they add the buy-and-sell of commercial jingles, computer pop-up ads, and the corporate media’s God Bless America propaganda—all of which are so damn familiar that the resulting alienation which we experience becomes oddly comforting in its predictability. We forget that even the overused term “thinking outside the box” was itself a commercial cliché

in its original advertising context. Never mind. Just drink deeply from the waters of oblivion and be sedated.

But, are we sedated? Twenty-first century manifestations of the agoraphobic impulse can be alternatively understood as evidence that the tantalizing logic of the market can never be so pervasive as to be totalizing. All is not lost. Rather than dismiss those with agoraphobic sensitivities in apolitical terms, we should recognize their situation as being analogous to that of the unfortunate canary in the coal mine, warning us of imminent danger so that we can get the hell out of there before it is too late. Just as paranoia can be seen as a heightened state of awareness, agoraphobia needs to be recognized as a distress signal that highlights social rather than individual causation. The problem is collective and so is the solution.

As anarchists, we might be wise to recognize “the agoraphobe within”—since the same oppressive social tensions which cause an agoraphobic reaction in those of us who are especially sensitive to them are by now internalized in everyone’s consciousness. Perhaps what we need now is a radical reinterpretation of agoraphobia as, in essence, a refusal of the marketplace, akin to the refusal of wage slavery at the point of production and the refusal of consent at the polling place. Agoraphobia could then be recast as an embryonic cry of resistance to the terrorism of the capitalist marketplace rather than merely being seen as a halting whimper of despair, desperately uttered as the victim slowly sinks more and more deeply into the economic mire. From the depths of the quagmire, we hear the rising scream: *“I am not a market!”*





—Sheila Nopper

# The Myth of Government Sponsored Revolution: A Cautionary Tale

My porcupine radio sweetens all challenges  
and defies the national average.  
It has the music of refusal written all over it.

—Franklin Rosemont,  
“General Strike,”

*Lamps Hurled at the Stunning Algebra of Ants*, 1990

After first announcing tentative plans on January 28, 1999 for legalizing low power radio and allowing for a lengthy year long period of public comment, study, and deliberation, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman William Kennard floated a reform proposal on January 19, 2000 which provided new rules that envisioned the licensing of an estimated 1,000 new Low Power FM (LPFM) stations in the range of 10-100 watts. Yet, by the end of the first year, after 1200 applications had already been filed in the 20 states initially eligible to participate in the LPFM sweepstakes, Congress caved in to lobbying pressure from both the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and National Public Radio (NPR) and gutted this already modest FCC proposal for a new LPFM radio service.

Amidst an NAB and NPR scare campaign about potential interference problems, the language of what had once been the industry-promoted Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act was attached as a rider to the Omnibus Budget Act of 2000. Using the threat of supposed interference as a pretext, the Act limits the number of possible licenses by holding newly created LPFM stations to an extremely conservative standard of having to be three bandwidths (rather than two as the FCC had originally mandated) away from any other station already existing on the dial (89.1-92.1 instead of 90.1-92.1, for instance).

Even with this enhanced spacing restriction, there was a flood of applications. In late December 2000 estimates by the pro-LPFM Pro-

metheus Radio Project, the number of licensed LPFM stations which met the three bandwidth requirement ranged from 250-500. However, these stations were mostly in rural areas because the new spacing rules were very difficult to meet in urban localities. Of course, full implementation optimistically assumed there would be no future backroom legislative deals to squelch the LPFM service or efforts by executive branch power brokers to let it die on the vine from neglect.

### *Stalling the Process*

Revealingly, in 2000, Congress called on the FCC to test the economic impact of these new stations on corporate radio outlets as well as the aforementioned possibility of interference problems. These newly required tests, of course, served to stall full implementation of the LPFM service with no date specified as to the length of the experiment. Finally, in 2003, the MITRE study, as it was called, proved the radio industry's claims of possible interference to be false. However, nothing has changed in spite of Congressional lobbying efforts by grassroots LPFM proponents for repeal of the 3 band-width interference rule. Ultimately, Congress, which in an unprecedented move has usurped authority for implementation from the FCC, must decide the future of the new radio service.

As early as 2001, the future of a more expansive LPFM looked bleak with George W. Bush in the White House, a Republican-controlled Congress, and the presidentially-appointed FCC chair Michael Powell calling the shots. While the FCC's original LPFM rules were ultimately superseded by Congressional edict, it is worth noting that even they were controversial not only within NAB/NPR circles, but also inside the free radio movement itself where many saw them as constituting a Trojan horse.

The FCC—intentionally or in effect—promoted a divide and conquer strategy that split the movement into two camps. The first camp consisted of those who supported licensed LPFM, like the Prometheus Radio Project, largely organized by the disenfranchised buccaneers of Philadelphia's Radio Mutiny station, which had been shut down by the FCC. After tirelessly lobbying the FCC and Congress on behalf of LPFM, the Prometheus Radio Project led workshops throughout the country in relation to the final FCC plan under the banner of, "So You Want To Apply For A Low Power FM License?"

Though not opposing radio piracy per se, these touring workshops emphasized the licensed LPFM model in a way that was in marked contrast to an earlier Radio Mutiny era tour, which had incited free radio

stations to go on the air without a license in defiance of the FCC. Prometheus has continued to organize on behalf of LPFM, even when faced with the Omnibus Budget Act's efforts at "radio preservation," which reduced the number of potential licensees to about half of the FCC's originally promised number.

In the opposing camp were those—like microradio pioneers Mban-na Kantako (Human Rights Radio in Springfield, Illinois) and Stephen Dunifer (Free Radio Berkeley)—who refused to endorse the lobbying of Congress in support of even the FCC's initial LPFM proposal, seeing it as an attempt at government cooptation. From their perspective, such a government-initiated legalization strategy is more about enclosure than free speech, in much the same way that the "free speech pens" at demonstrations *limit* freedom to a circumscribed geographical space rather than facilitating its expansion. Similarly, in a Venomous Butterfly publication, Paso Occupato and Barocchio Occupato argue that attempts at the "legalization of occupied space" fly in the face of the anarchist project of "self-organization." Ultimately, as Kantako and Dunifer predicted, the original LPFM proposal fell victim to the more entrenched power of the broadcasting industry, if not in its earlier FCC stage, then later on at the Congressional level, where the NAB could be relied upon to flex its lobbying muscles in an election year.

As Dunifer put it in a widely circulated email message to the free radio movement on January 12, 2000,

Writing to your Congressman is not going to do any good unless there is a check for at least \$10,000 attached with a promise of more to come . . . Congress does not give a rat's ass about what any of us think or want. And neither does the FCC, it's all about damage control on Kennard's part. He knows that the government does not have the resources to deal with thousands of folks taking back *their* airwaves. So he had to come up with a strategy that would fool folks who somehow still believe the system has a degree of legitimacy and credibility and would participate in the process—just a charade really in the final analysis . . . Our real strength has always been the threat of an ungovernable situation on the airwaves—let's make that threat a damn credible reality by putting hundreds and thousands of free radio stations on the air.

In fact, the FCC's proposal for LPFM refused to acknowledge the free radio movement's role in forcing the issue of low power broadcasting onto the public policy-making agenda in the first place. It also failed to



recognize the action of seizing the airwaves as being within the framework of either civil disobedience or based upon an interventionist initiative aimed at squatting the airwaves with no assertion of legal rights or concern for future legalization. Even the original FCC rules allowed no amnesty for the micropower broadcasters who had previously been busted or who, by remaining on the air, had challenged the FCC's old prohibition of stations under 100 watts and raised the larger issues of free speech and the "right to communicate."

When the preliminary announcement of pending LPFM rules was made, Kennard ordered illegal broadcasters to halt operations within 24 hours of being instructed to do so by the FCC (or by February 26, 1999) if they expected to be eligible for possible licensing in the future. By the end of 2000, this promise had ultimately proved fleeting.

However, it had by then created a rift in the micropower movement as many unlicensed broadcasters rushed to "clean up" their acts in anticipation of LPFM licenses down the road. Those hopes were eventually dashed by the Congress. Such a sequence of events is not unusual in the context of a corporate state in which FCC liberals offered the carrot of licenses—rather than simply relying on the stick of shutdowns—in order to regain control of the airwaves.

The carrot was in essence the stick by other means, but the stick never fully disappeared. Instead, shutdowns actually increased, and the limited amnesty promised was removed by more conservative legislators once the damage to micropower movement solidarity had already been done.

### *Smothering Free Radio in Bureaucracy*

Many free radio broadcasters, however, refused to abandon their stations since they had no desire to be officially licensed, even under the government-manufactured version of free radio, LPFM. Others held firm out of distrust of the FCC and/or a legislative process that was dominated by the corporate broadcasting industry. The original micropower broadcasters were not allowed to be licensed if they had refused to leave the airwaves during the approximately two years that transpired from the time of Kennard's initial rule-making announcement until the passage of the Omnibus Budget Act of 2000. In so doing, the FCC had acted to re-establish its authority over the airwaves and punish those radio rebels who had dared to challenge it. Even the limited amnesty promised to those free radio pioneers who had voluntarily gone off the air in anticipation of an LPFM license was denied. The suspicions of LPFM crit-

ics were proven valid in the end. Ironically, as the first African American chair of the FCC, Kennard's proposal was the bureaucratic equivalent of telling civil rights activist Rosa Parks that though everyone else could now sit wherever they wanted in the bus, she must remain seated in the back because the Montgomery bus boycott which she helped organize had been illegal under the laws of the Jim Crow South.

Like all government regulatory agencies, in spite of its populist rhetoric, the FCC has been captured by the very interest groups that it supposedly exists to regulate. Accordingly, the license approval process is subject to industry-dictated constraints rather than the democratic priorities of redistributing the airwaves along more diverse and egalitarian lines. The FCC rules actually act to enclose free radio within bureaucratic guidelines. Though the LPFM stations were originally designated noncommercial, initial reports indicate that political dissidents, grassroots activists, and groups marginalized on the basis of a progressive to radical stance on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation will still be overwhelmingly excluded from the airwaves in favor of more moderate non-profit organizations, middle class minority entrepreneurs, and "respectable" church groups.

In fact, almost half of the licenses approved in the first round were church-related, with many of these being awarded to right-wing Christian fundamentalists. Moreover, as Sarah Posner has pointed out in her 2005 *Alternet* article "Right-wing Radio," officially licensed LPFM stations are being crowded off the air by religious broadcasters using translator licenses to transmit programs from their bigger full-power parent stations across a number of states, especially targeting rural areas and leaving little room for local LPFM stations on the spectrum. In that regard, in spite of organized opposition by grassroots LPFM supporters, which has resulted in a temporary freeze on the licensing of translator stations, much of the damage has already been done and, of course, an FCC freeze can be lifted by that same agency at any time.

Moreover, a very real potential problem for new recruits to the free radio movement is that the FCC can once again claim that it has legalized low watt radio, even though Congress has drastically reduced the number of eligible stations formerly proposed. Using this pretext, it can now give its agents the green light to aggressively go after those radio stations operating without a license. Previously, public opinion was often on the side of the free radio stations, which many saw as being unjustly restricted from entry to the radio dial, but the FCC can now claim that

any aspiring station should simply follow LPFM guidelines and apply for a license if it wants to broadcast.

Ironically, Prometheus has inadvertently clouded the issue of who has the right to communicate by its use of the term “community-authorized pirate stations,” leaving one to wonder who “authorizes” them and what will happen to those increasingly defenseless stations not so “authorized.” Their 2005 “Prometheus Merchandise” catalog only adds to the confusion. While they carry the volume, *Seizing The Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook*, which I co-edited with Stephen Dunifer, their accompanying blurb is very misleading. It says in part: “This book predates LPFM by a few years, to a time when your only option was to raise an antenna, run the jolly roger up the mast, and wait for the federal agents to come knocking at your door.” This revisionist history seems to imply that free radio no longer exists—or even needs to—because it now has been superseded by LPFM, which is considered to be the culmination of the original free radio movement dream. The substance of this assertion glosses over what continues to be a hotly contested issue.

Regardless of the dilution of the original FCC plan, the traditional regulatory idea that micropower radio stations are legitimately subject to government crackdown efforts if they decide to go on the air without first formally being licensed has been given new currency. Formerly unlicensed stations have faced ever increasing harassment since the FCC put LPFM into motion.

Predictably, one of the first stations hit by this renewed wave of government repression was Human Rights Radio (HRR) in Springfield, Illinois, which suffered two FCC raids at the end of 2000. In both cases the spurious charge was that the station was causing interference with air traffic control signals. Astoundingly, the air traffic controller who testified to the interference in court claimed the HRR signal was coming from the John Hay Homes public housing project, which had once been its home, but which had been torn down years before his complaint.

Moreover, as Stephen Dunifer explained in an open letter originally sent to Springfield’s *State Journal Register* but never published, the threat of such interference was being used as a red herring (the letter was later printed in a special Fall 2000 issue of the Springfield zine, *War Bulletin*.) As Dunifer put it in his letter,

Air traffic control signals are narrow band AM, an amplitude modulated carrier with a frequency spread of 25 kilohertz or less, while micropower transmitters are FM, a frequency modulated

carrier with a frequency spread of plus or minus 75 kilohertz taking up a channel 200 kilohertz wide. It would be very difficult for an air traffic radio receiver to receive an intelligible errant signal from an FM broadcast transmitter due to the fact that the receiver is designed only to pick up an AM signal that is much more narrow in spectrum width than an FM broadcast signal.

Regardless of these technical facts, in order to gain popular support, the FCC has increasingly relied on stories about planes falling out of the sky due to errant micropower transmissions as justification for their campaign to shut down unlicensed broadcasters, and Springfield's media have taken these claims at face value.

The first bust of HRR occurred in October 2000, just one week after it was announced in local media outlets that 13 groups in the Springfield area had applied for a seat at the table for the then-promised cornucopia of legally-sanctioned LPFM licenses. As if the message sent was not clear enough, the prosecuting attorney in court who successfully obtained an injunction requiring that HRR remained shut down, used the argument that the station was a renegade entity which deserved no sympathy now that LPFM licenses were in the offing. She noted that if HRR's Mbanna Kantako was a serious broadcaster, he should have applied for an LPFM license. Of course, Kantako could not apply for a license even if he wanted to do so (which he does not), since the FCC and Congress refused amnesty to former (un)civil disobedients like himself.

### *Predictable Actions, Mainstream Media Coverage, & the Continuing Fight for Free Airwaves*

Later on, this prohibition of amnesty for Kantako was conveniently ignored in the December 28, 2000 *State Journal Register* coverage of LPFM, which simplistically explained that Kantako had merely not applied for a license. The article then went on to celebrate the tentative licensing of two applicants in the nearby rural towns of Pana (where a church group had applied) and Taylorville (where ham radio hobbyists got approval).

In that same issue of the newspaper, reporter Matt Dietrich added insult to injury. At first, he failed to cover the story of Kantako's October bust, in spite of an email campaign directed at the editor of the *State Journal Register*, which had been mobilized by a call to action on the national Independent Media Center website. Instead, Dietrich stayed true to corporate media form and wrote a "feel good" story profiling a legal

low power radio station operator located in Springfield's predominantly black eastside community.

Of course, the station in question is only 100 milliwatts strong (1/10 of a watt), and its programming consists entirely of playing R&B oldies rather than challenging the powers that be. But Dietrich repeatedly alluded to the operator as acting like a model citizen for doing everything by the book and being extremely careful about interference unlike, by implication, Kantako.

No mention was made of the fact that none of the 13 applicants for LPFM licenses in Springfield were deemed eligible under the new Omnibus Budget Act rules. Nor was any attempt made to interview them now that their license hopes had been scuttled, even though at the end of the filing period, they had originally been the subject of a "feel good" story of their own, which seemed to imply that their licenses were in the bag. By 2005, groups applying for LPFM licenses nationally totaled 3500. However, the number who have a radical perspective actually receiving licenses was few and far between.

Likewise, the message to African Americans in Springfield was clear: be appropriately thankful for a minuscule legal station and you'll be the darling of the mainstream media, but fight for your right of access to the airwaves as a radio resister and your station will get negative coverage and you will be personally vilified as a threat to public safety. As for Kantako, he ignored the injunction and was back on the air within about a week of the first bust. He then resumed broadcasting again in the wake of the second raid on his home-based station.

While Stephen Dunifer has lately become involved in designing and developing low power VHF and UHF television transmitters (which use off-the-shelf technology capable of reaching a distance of 4-5 miles), his free TV efforts have not dampened his enthusiasm for free radio. He still travels around the world as a sort of free radio Johnny Appleseed, leaving micropower radio transmitters everywhere in his path. In short, the anarchist potential of the humble micropower radio transmitter is still at the forefront of the present global struggle for independent media in ways that challenge both the FCC's attempt at enclosure of the free radio movement through the promotion of their normalizing LPFM strategy and the National Association of Broadcasters' reactionary attempt to dismantle even that admittedly reformist approach.

Stay tuned!





—Michael Schwartz



# Puppets vs Puppets

We are converging  
We are on the move!

Puppet arresters  
can't silence us.  
Fire marshals' warrants  
can't shut us down  
Now!

Truncheons  
can't hold us back  
Pepper spray  
can't blind us  
Tear gas  
can't cloud our vision  
Now!

We are converging  
We are on the move!

They can't  
select/elect/genuflect to  
a President anymore  
without our voices  
piercing  
the manufactured hoopla  
of politricks  
as usual

We are converging  
We are on the move!

They must sing  
their corporate siren songs  
of WTO/IMF/World Bank  
amidst our convulsive beauty  
as we improvise  
a street chorus  
of rage  
and resistance.  
We do our own  
dance of desire  
on their corpses.

We are converging  
We are on the move!

They pretend  
that we do not exist  
except as criminals  
while the real criminals  
are crowned  
as first ladies  
as statesmen  
and billionaires.

We are converging  
We are on the move!

We are anarchists  
We spit  
on their crowns  
We laugh  
derisively  
at their offer  
of a McJob  
in the  
misery-making-matrix.

We see  
through their lies  
with Haymarket eyes.  
We lock arms  
in solidarity  
with the past  
We open arms  
in dreams  
of an anarchist future.

Tell  
the undercover agents  
the sleeping dragon  
has awakened  
and is storming  
the castle

while their  
helicopters  
hover  
helplessly  
overhead.

We are converging  
We are on the move!  
We are unstoppable!

(Originally presented at  
the "Renewing the An-  
archist Tradition" gath-  
ering, held in Vermont,  
August 24-27, 2000).



—Sue Simensky Bietila

# Whose Streets, Our Streets!

## Introductory Note

In April 2000, I joined the days of resistance to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington DC. *Je Ne Sais Quoi* interviewed me in May of 2000 about the event. As part of the ongoing confrontation with global capital, my impressions are recounted here. While not nearly as dramatic or as glamorous as the previous year's events in Seattle, this interview offers a "snapshot" of the exhilaration that characterized the early days of the North American wing of the "global liberation" movement, as well as providing warning signals of the surge of police state repression to come as the once unexpected direct action tactics of 1999 became all too predictable.

Though typically referred to as the anti-globalization movement, that term is simplistic and misleading. What kind of globalization is being opposed? "Anti-corporate globalization," "anti-neoliberal globalization," and "global anti-capitalism" are more specific, but while these terms explain what the global liberation movement seeks to disengage from, they don't explain what we desire. The current global uprising draws from anarchist practice in relation to such things as affinity groups and consensus decision-making—but less so from anarchist theory. Many people who are "anti-globalization" continue to support the nation state, or favor national corporations, as bulwarks against multinational globalization. This approach may be one that is "anti-globalization," but it is certainly not anarchist.

I see my role as an anarchist in such a heterogeneous movement, or in the more recently established anti-Iraq war/occupation movement, as linking up with those who share my affinity for creating a visionary anarchist practice with no holds barred and no bars to hold us. When the "official" organizers of these events attempt to channel nascent anarchist energy in a more authoritarian direction, they never fully succeed, and it is precisely their inability to maintain control that is most hopeful.

**JNSQ:** *The DC protests seemed to be almost entirely organized by affinity groups. Can you explain what an affinity group is?*

**Ron:** An affinity group is an anarchist organizational form that aspires to a great depth of mutual understanding among its members. The term dates back to the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s with its “grupos de afinidad.” Affinity groups surfaced once again in the 70s’ direct actions against nuclear power plants like Seabrook in the US and the 80s’ women’s peace camp actions like Greenham Common in the UK. More recently, they were popularized by the Direct Action Network in the Battle of Seattle as the century closed. They are small, informal, autonomous, horizontal, close-knit, very mobile, can make decisions quickly, can change direction, and are flexible. I had arranged to meet up with my affinity group, who had come from all over the US to be there, on the day prior to the DC action.

**JNSQ:** *With what purpose did you go to DC?*

**Ron:** People came to DC with a lot of different purposes. Some people were there because they wanted to reform the global institutions of power that increasingly operate in ways that affect us locally. I’m not in favor of reforming such institutions. I’m in favor of absolutely resisting and ultimately destroying them. So I was there as an abolitionist.

The other reason that I went there was to put my body on the line, to be part of a group of people that were taking to the streets to make their opinions and ideas known and to shed light on such shadowy organizations as the World Bank and IMF which operate behind closed doors.

Third, after Seattle, I was interested in seeing what forms these protests would take as we moved into the new century. Some exciting departures happened in Seattle, and I wanted to see how they played themselves out in DC.

**JNSQ:** *So what did you do and what did you see while you were there?*

**Ron:** When we got there, we went down to the convergence center, which was the place where people were meeting throughout the week, organizing activities and infoshops, connecting with other people, and figuring out how they were going to participate in this action. Some people were making puppets and developing a variety of activities to support the demonstrations. Upon arriving, we found that the Center had been closed by the cops and the fire department, supposedly on a fire violation, but it was pretty transparent that they were trying to obstruct the

opposition. One cop said people were making Molotov cocktails there. About the closest thing to a Molotov cocktail that I saw at the convergence center was the pile of materials which people were using to make puppets. So, the cops arrested the puppets, but they couldn't kill the rebellious spirit that animated them. There were people with signs outside immediately afterward that said, "Puppets arrest puppets."

Once the convergence center was moved to a new location, we checked out a variety of activities that were going on there. We then went to the Independent Media Center site. The IMC was using the "open source" model pioneered by the free radio movement for computer networking, and they had set up a pirate radio station which was on-air during the protests. Later, the government tried to shut the station down right after the protest had happened. The cops, the FBI, and the FCC tried to raid it, but 200 people appeared in solidarity with the radio station and they successfully prevented the police raid from succeeding by spontaneously throwing up a defensive blockade around it.

We also were involved in a number of different actions in the street, of course, some of which I can tell you about. One of them was to support the people who were committing civil disobedience by closing down intersections. One of the things that happened when they raided the convergence center is that the cops took building materials, like PVC pipe, which is used in putting together "sleeping dragons," armlocks for blockading entrances. The activists had not yet used any of these materials to commit an act of civil disobedience. They were just at the center, waiting to be used. When you commit civil disobedience, the understanding is that you will be subject to arrest, and everybody who participates realizes that s/he can be arrested. But this was a preemptive raid, and they arrested people in the streets as well who were suspected of having such equipment. Since they were faced with constant harassment, we wanted to support the people who were doing the blockades as much as possible, heighten their spirits, and keep them aware of the fact that they weren't alone.

The other thing we did was to be part of a number of different marches. One featured a makeshift anarchist marching band—using plastic buckets to beat rhythms while they marched to reclaim the streets. Whenever the cops would come and try to retake the streets, the cry of "Whose streets? Our streets!" filled the air.

It was clear that this was a demonstration that involved reclaiming public space. The cops had barricaded off a ninety-square-block area around the World Bank and IMF, so you couldn't get too close to those

institutions. But by putting up barricades in order to protect those institutions, they pretty much gave over the streets outside that perimeter to the protesters. One person said that we didn't shut down the IMF and World Bank, unlike in Seattle where the WTO was shut down; instead, the cops shut the city down for us. In fact, on Monday, which was a working day, many people in DC were told by the authorities not to come to work.

The meeting was held, yes, but the cops had to do some unusual things to allow that to happen. One of them was that some of the big shots at the meeting had to sleep at the World Bank building the night before. Others were taken there in police buses at five in the morning from their hotel rooms which were located nearby in the downtown area. So while the meeting did happen, it certainly wasn't business as usual, and that was one of the objectives of those of us who were there to disrupt it.

Not only was the public made aware of what these neo-liberal institutions were and what they do in the world, but the suits that run them learned that they wouldn't be able to have their meetings without social upheaval. I think wherever they try to meet in the future, there are always going to be people in the streets protesting.

As part of my affinity group, I was able to move in and out of a number of different situations, pick up on the energy, march, laugh, play, and be angry, all in a variety of ways. There were actions that were very theatrical. Some were very militant. Some were spontaneous, while others were more predictable.

As an example of the latter, the mainstream march was very similar to the march in Seattle that went nowhere near where the protest was being held. The direct action protests were happening downtown. Yet, you had political celebrities giving boring speeches at the Ellipse, and then, they had the crowd march in a circular route that carefully avoided getting anywhere near where the direct action was happening or where the people were protesting around the barricades. People were told by the parade marshals at the march that they were safe from arrest if they stayed in the boundaries where the legally permitted marches were going to happen, but they might be subject to arrest if they went beyond that sanctioned area.

Of course, a number of people felt that this approach smacked of collusion with the cops, broke off from that march and went where the action was, to the barricades. Other people just got bored and left, and went and did something else. In addition to the legal march, other marches were unsanctioned and essentially illegal in the sense that they didn't have a permit. In those, the energy was much more exciting, you

felt much more a part of a movement of people that was challenging the status quo, and risking arrest in order to disrupt the institutions of power, and I was having a great time being involved. There was camaraderie there. There were high spirits. There was a feeling of people coming together in no uncertain terms to take on the powers that be. I found that very invigorating.

So, we moved in and out of a lot of different situations. We weren't part of any organized bloc. We weren't interested in getting arrested, so we didn't do civil disobedience. We risked arrest, in a number of different cases, but we were able to be mobile and moved in and out of the action flash points relatively quickly and as invisibly as possible. We certainly weren't interested in just being part of some approved march or self-congratulatory civil disobedience campaign.

So, we tried to be cagey. We took risks, but we were careful not to get caught.

**JNSQ:** *I heard that it was called a carnival against capital? It sounds like there were a number of different things happening that were exciting and fun.*

**Ron:** Yeah, there were a lot of carnivalesque moments. There were people in costumes. There were people who had worked on papier-mâché puppets, and there was one large puppet called Liberation. It was bright yellow and looked like the sun and people gathered around that solar energy. There was a large puppet of a monkeywrench. There was a pig that was supposed to represent the greed of the World Bank. There were the radical cheerleaders, invoking humor and spurring people on at the same time by bustin' chants and hot dance moves. There was music being made by a variety of people in the streets which ranged from noisy to meditative. There would be moments when people would just break off and do an "om" chant.

I think there are a number of good reasons for creating such a carnival atmosphere. One of them is that organizers have gotten more sophisticated in terms of understanding that you have to lift people's spirits. It isn't about somebody with a bullhorn alongside you telling you what to say and shaking their fist at the organizations of power. Part of it is coming together in a community of resistance based upon a diversity of tactics. That can be very powerful.

Also, historically during the protests involving Central America that happened in relation to the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador during



the Reagan years, as Latinos became involved in those kinds of issues, all of a sudden the rhythms of protest changed. People brought drums and Latin rhythms to the solidarity movement. I think that was a very significant influence in creating a grassroots realization that there was a possibility for doing something more than the kind of typically earnest leftist march after which everybody feels very de-energized. Also, the punk influence was in evidence with a “let’s go out there and tear it down” kind of badass attitude.

If you put all of those diverse elements together, you get a kind of carnival atmosphere which challenges something not just with the word “No,” but with the word, “YES!” Yes to the forces of Life and No to the forces of Death. This choice cannot be clearer than when you see these cops in their ninja outfits. When the cops came out in their armor, one activist had a recording of the *Star Wars* theme that he blasted, and it was perfect; it was the Evil Empire.

If you want people to join a resistance movement, you have to have a movement that people want to join. People want to join a movement because it’s an exciting place to be. People are fighting the power, but they’re also having fun. And in the process, they’re building a community of resistance. They’re a group of people that you feel kinship with, and that’s where the affinity groups come into play. The affinity groups all come together in large demonstrations, but each autonomous affinity group has an intimacy to it, and so you don’t feel as alienated as was often the case with the mass mobilizations of the 60s in relation to the Vietnam war.

I think any resistance movement, in order to attract large numbers of people, has to be romantic. It’s not just about being there because you’re opposed to the World Bank. A lot of people are opposed to the World Bank who may not have come if they thought it was only the kind of demonstration that petitions government or corporate elites to change their policies. Ironically, by emphasizing self-expression, you encourage people to be part of something bigger than themselves, maybe even to risk arrest, in creating the foundations of another kind of world beyond the realm of global capital and the nation state.

**JNSQ:** *It taps people’s creative energy that’s normally pretty repressed.*

**Ron:** It’s a way in which people can get in touch with the creative energy in themselves by working with other people. You don’t have to go to art school to be an artist. The DIY approach is based on the idea that everybody has creative capacity. So when organizers create an event that

encourages people to use their creativity to express themselves in relation to the particular issue at hand rather than telling them what to think and how to express themselves, that's empowering.

**JNSQ:** *Time magazine did a big article explaining how the protest was organized and criticized it for having no leaders. But, I think that probably works to the advantage of the movement because there's no one that the forces of capitalism can point to and target as someone to get rid of.*

**Ron:** Yeah, or to co-opt, which is another way of getting rid of somebody. I think it's important for a lot of reasons. Some say that they want to create a movement that's leaderless, but really it's leaderful, where everybody's a leader. Everybody is encouraged to exercise their leadership capabilities, but nobody is in charge or has power over others. People make decisions without it being done in a hierarchical way.

Anarchists are opposed to hierarchy, and while a lot of the people who were there wouldn't consider themselves anarchists, the flavor of the protests was very anarchistic in the sense that there wasn't an agreed-upon leader or elite body that spoke for everybody. Decisions in the street weren't predetermined by a small cadre of people operating as an executive committee.

One reporter from the *Washington Post* explained how disorganized the protests were by pointing out that people had to actually sit down in the middle of an action with their affinity groups and figure out what to do next. He didn't have a clue in understanding how a consensus model of decision-making was intentionally different than the hierarchical model. To him, it was just evidence that things were disorganized, rather than seeing it as an anarchist form of participatory decision-making that differs from the standard kind of top down organizing model where you have leadership directives that people follow. The dichotomy between leaders and followers does not exist in anarchist theory, and anarchist practice is concerned with making that dream a reality.





—Chris McClarren, “Blasfemme’s Bullhorn”

## Hangin' Out on the Corner of Music & Resistance

*When I reflect back upon my nearly six decades on the planet, it seems clear to me that the corner of Music and Resistance has always been one of my favorite hangouts. At this unmapped intersection, Jayne Cortez dubs a spitfire blues poem at the revolutionary tea party thrown by Lillian Allen; the ghost of Johnny Dyani kicks out an anti-apartheid bass line for a Dead Prez throw down; Fela Kuti explodes like a time bomb set off by the imprisonment of people's poet Mzwakhe Mbuli; and Brother Resistance steps out from a Carnival mas band to stop traffic for Michael Franti as he blows up a television set causing Boots Riley of The Coup to detonate a wicked laugh that shatters the illusions of global capitalism as his musical partner in thought crime Pam the Funkstress scratches its shit-stemic epitaph in vinyl.*

While such rebel musics have not been my exclusive focus as a writer, they have been my constant companion. They have nurtured my critical consciousness, sparked fresh intellectual insights, uplifted my spirits, reinforced my anger at injustice, and fueled my utopian dreams of a better world. Politically-engaged music provides the soundtrack, aiding and abetting the process of breaking free from the chains of oppression and emerging from the shadows of alienation. It sustains me in hard political times when I might otherwise fall victim to a disempowering isolation. In the streets, it buoys my energy level like an in-your-face batucada beat adrenaline rush from the Infernal Noise Brigade or a blast of hot wind cut from Bakunin's Bum directly into the face of the corporate state.

Though the above artists were/are often self-consciously political in their music, that is not where the story begins for me. When people ask me to name my biggest influences in forming a radical political con-

sciousness in 1960s America, they expect me to rattle off a list of authors and books. Confounding these expectations, I immediately respond, “John Coltrane.” Trane’s expansive diasporic consciousness and his improvisational flights of exploration encouraged me to see beyond the chord changes of consensus reality. Long before that, however, the first 45 rpm record that I ever laid my hands on was “Get A Job” by the Silhouettes on the tiny Ember label.

While known in oldies circles these days for its “shananana” refrain, it is a much more complex record than your average doowop love song of the period, and I think that even with a preteen consciousness, I realized its complexity way back then. After all, though I was raised in a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, it was the first song that I’d ever heard about anything that was even remotely about the everyday life of working people. The fact that it was not about romantic love or teenage dating was in itself a revelation. It was a tune not about work but the humiliations of having to look for a job and not finding one. Clearly, this was not a lefty folk hymn to the dignity of labor or a poem to full employment. As was often the case with earlier blues records, written boldly between the lines came an implicit understanding that having to get a job was about succumbing to participation in an economic system that kept black men at the lowest rungs of the employment ladder.

Though in the song the stereotypically nagging wife sends our working class hero “out of bed crying” to pound the pavement looking for a gig that he knows he’ll never find, in a larger context, the pressures of the capitalist system and institutionalized racism compose the subtext of the Want Ads that issue the “Get A Job” ultimatum. Moreover, the stereotype of the lazy black male cannot be separated from the black street slang of the period which referred to a job as a “slave.” This song, to its strength, treats the wage slavery problems it encounters by making a mockery of the job search and the likelihood of finding self-affirming employment. Forgoing the directness of the “protest song,” it offers a humorous send up of the racism imbedded in the work ethic sung from the bottom up point of view of the reluctant wage slave himself. By 2001, The Coup’s “Lazymuthafucka” would take the critique of the economics of racism that was latent in “Get A Job” and make it blatant by turning the tables on “laziness” to indict the parasitical rich.

In our table-turning strategy, we might also take a lesson from jazz improvisation. As African-American surrealist poet Ted Joans sees it, jazz as an improvisational music is about “surrealizing a song” (Kelley in

Sakolsky, 2002, p. 138). That is, using the transformative powers of our imagination as the basis for reclaiming our creativity in a world of miserabilist compromises. Even popular culture at its most banal is “reclaimable” in this sense. Radical music scholar and percussionist Chris Cutler once remarked that it seemed odd to him that given John Coltrane’s brilliant improvisation on “My Favorite Things,” the composer credits are still given to Rodgers and Hammerstein (Cutler in Sakolsky/Ho, 1995, p. 70). Instead, if we could imagine a more radical and non-Eurocentric approach to rewarding creativity, Trane would be acknowledged as the author of that tune. And by going further in the direction of free improvisation, as Trane did, we can even leave the song form itself behind.

According to A.B. Spellman, Ornette Coleman prized the “beautiful accidents” by which the psychic automatism of spontaneous improvisation reveals what surrealists call the Marvelous (1970, p. 83). Over time, jazz musicians have sought to investigate the essence of Ornette’s early innovations rather than getting bogged down in new stylistic clichés as many had done in reaction to the music of Charlie Parker. Al Neil, retired jazz pianist and once an occasional contributor to Vancouver Surrealist Group art shows, noted in his autobiographical novel, *Changes*: “Ornette just plays the emotion, it is pure expression... Ornette opened things up for everybody but very few, if any, are copying his style. Instead, they marveled at his beautiful freedom and are finding their own way into that, as they are able.” (1989, pp. 52 and 163)

Further exploring the ideas of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler in a Black Bohemian context, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, as Robin D.G. Kelley has pointed out, “re-invented modernism through meditations and reflections on the meanings of freedom. In addition, they have moved Africa and its sprawling Diaspora from being the ‘counter’ modern (the primitive/the folk) to the very center of modernity. They claimed modernism for Black people, without apology” (Kelley in Sakolsky, 2002, p. 644).

Similarly, hip hop turntablists who cut up, remix, and creatively sample a song are “surrealizing” that tune through a technological process of layered improvisation, even though intellectual property laws still do not recognize this approach as artistically valid in its own right and require copyright fees that can cripple independent record label budgets. But surrealism has a natural affinity for collage. Not only turntablists and experimental sound artists, but on-air audio collagists like Mannlicher Carcano (Waterman), who engage in collaborative improvisation using

radio as their vehicle, can produce the kind of “convulsive beauty” that exists beyond the song form.

In my personal history, free jazz—including the sound experiments of the aforementioned Art Ensemble of Chicago and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) out of which it was born—alerted me to the improvisational connection between surrealism and music. As Johannes Bergmark has explained the desired result of that relationship, “Not until automatic song drowns the traffic noise, automatic painting flowers the walls and automatic poetry is a matter of course in conversation—in short, not until the free play of the passions guides life—will the surrealist revolution cease to be a *project of the future*.” (Bergmark, p. 57)

When I first moved from New York to the Chicago area in 1972, I kept writing to my former homies about the AACM underground being the future of jazz. As typical New Yorkers who think the universe revolves around NYC, they kindly but condescendingly humored me and reminded me of how much I was missing in relation to the burgeoning loft jazz scene that I now only got to sample during my occasional visits out East. I would report back on the marvels of going to see Muhal Richard Abrams’ Experimental Big Band in Monday night rehearsals at Transitions East, an unassuming storefront which was located at 79th and Cottage Grove on Chicago’s Southside. Later, at the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago, which had as its theme “Marvelous Freedom/Vigilance of Desire,” the AACM was given an exalted place in the surrealist firmament.

That the magic of the AACM’s improvisational music should find a linkage to surrealism’s emphasis on the realization of poetry in everyday life should come as no surprise. As with its longstanding association with the international movement for Black Liberation from Négritude to Black Power, one of the factors distinguishing surrealism from all other avant garde cultural movements of European origin is its multiracial character.

Quite naturally then, Chicago surrealists saw the collective manifestation of AACM musical projects as a “complimentary adventure.” The music championed by the AACM was not meant to be decorative, but as urgent as the heated struggle against colonialism, which had originally been addressed in 1955 by surrealist poet Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism*—issued like a hurricane warning from the French imperial outpost of his native Martinique. In the 1960s, as the defeated French pulled up their stakes in another colonial outpost, Vietnam, the US sought to pick up the pieces of empire.



At about this time, in the midst of my own opposition to the war in Vietnam as a college student, my consciousness of the imperial presence of the United States in the world was growing in leaps and bounds. While US warmakers and their embedded political pundits are quite open about it today, to use the term “American Empire” in mainstream discourse in those days was labeled as delusion.

At that time, in terms of conventional logic, the US was, though imperfect, the world’s greatest democracy, and it was the Soviet Union that was what Ronald Reagan would later call the Evil Empire. Both Marxists and anarchists were in agreement in labeling the Vietnam War as an imperialist venture, but, as long as the Soviet state existed, the use of the word imperialism seemed tarred with the brush of authoritarian state socialism. Anarchism was often simplistically lumped in with Marxism as part of the international communist conspiracy. Even now, though acknowledging that the thrust of global capitalism is clearly linked to the might of the US Empire, some radicals are reluctant to use the term *cultural* imperialism out of fear that it has too much Old Left baggage to be an effective tool of communication given the complexities of the post-Cold War era.

Yet, since cultural imperialism is itself complexly nuanced and is not as narrowly monolithic as vulgar economic interpretations allow, it continues to be a useful concept. For example, in Africa, African American music is typically prized above all other American music. This is a selective choice that is a product both of US cultural imperialism’s control of media and marketing and a diasporic consciousness of the music’s African derivation. In decoding this complexity, our analyses have to discern the balance between the imperial and the diasporic. Moreover, while the diasporic connection is obvious for a genre like rap, what about country music and rock? What do we make of the fact that there was once a vogue in West Africa for a country singer named Gentleman Jim Reeves or that US-based country music continues to be a big seller in Jamaica? In trying to explain these seeming anomalies, we could remember that country music is not simplistically “white” in origin and even bluegrass has African roots.

Take for example Arnold Shultz. Though he never recorded, his spirit hovers over American folk music, whispering his hidden secret to all those with ears to listen to the interracial qualities of what is typically portrayed as racially separate. Topical folksinger and amateur ethnomusicologist Dave Lippman recounts Shultz’s story in his excellent but sadly

neglected self-published book *Bleaching Our Roots: Race and Culture In American Popular Music* (1996). Receiving his slave name from Revolutionary War veteran and slavemaster Mathias Shultz of the Green River region of western Kentucky, Arnold was the child of the last of his ancestors to have once lived in slavery. He began as a songster playing guitar around the turn of the century at a time when in isolated mountain communities those of African American and European American descent made music together at square dances, picnics, and other occasions calling for string bands.

Though standards of “racial etiquette” were certainly in effect in these gatherings, one of Shultz’s playing partners was a fiddler by the name of Pendleton Vandirer, later to be known to bluegrass audiences as Bill Monroe’s “Uncle Pen” as a result of the song of the same name. As Monroe himself once put it in an interview with James Rooney: “There’s things in my music, you know, that come from Arnold Shultz—runs that I use in a lot of my music I don’t say that I make them the same way that he could make them ‘cause he was powerful with it. In following a fiddle piece or a breakdown, he used a pick and he could just run from one chord to another the prettiest you’ve ever heard. There’s no guitar picker today that could do that. I tried to keep in mind a little of it—what I could salvage to use in my music. Then he could play blues and I wanted some blues in my music too, you see.” (Rooney, 1971, pp. 23-24)

What then does it mean that the widely acknowledged “father” of bluegrass music—and by dint of that, much of the country music that followed in its wake—was “inventing” a music that, though its “whiteness” is now made to seem unquestionable by the music industry and is likewise assumed in popular consciousness (though the revisionist film *O Brother Where Art Thou* hints otherwise), was, in fact, as Harry Smith documented in his *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), deeply biracial in its origins?

Smith was a trickster whose cleverly orchestrated version of America was designed to turn its image of itself upside down. Though the recordings, culled from over 20,000 in his personal archives, date from 1927-1932, the *Anthology* itself was not released until 1952. By the very nature of its construction, it resisted the moribund strictures of the McCarthy Era and attempted to rescue the iconoclasm of American mythology from sliding into the clutches of deadening conformity.

The “culture wars” are nothing new, and Smith seemed to realize at a gut level that what was at stake was the heart and soul of America. What

a slyly subversive move to give his creation the generic title—*The Anthology of American Folk Music*! Surely, many of those innocents who bought it hoping for a nostalgic glimpse of Americana were sorely disappointed, but others had their eyes/ears opened to an American dreamscape alive with the rhythmic pulse of hot blooded rebellion, lust, mayhem, and the promise of redemption. This is no officially sanitized history of American folk music—but a mid-Twentieth Century ghost dance along the fault lines of the American psyche.

Smith knew, in the words of some of the artists on the *Anthology*, that “a poor boy a long way from home” could only find his way to the Light by exploring the “dark holler where the sun refuses to shine.” Within the *Anthology* is a roots music about rootlessness (that is, an American roots music). The music he chronicles features the exploits, wry laments, and trenchant humor of America’s most passionate marginals and outcasts—drifters, rounders, scoundrels, drunkards, con men, hobos, bums, outlaws, bankrobbers, murderers, bad men, and fallen women of all kinds.

American yes, but without a hint of jingoism.

When you hear Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers sing in “White House Blues,” “Roosevelt’s in the White House, he’s doing his best. McKinley’s in the graveyard, he’s taking his rest,” it’s abundantly clear that this is not meant to be a patriotic ballad. Who is being celebrated here? Roosevelt or McKinley or neither? Is it the singer getting the last laugh on both presidents? Or is it Leon Czolgosz, McKinley’s anarchist assassin? This song is every bit as much about the results of a crime of passion as a murder ballad like “Fatal Flower Garden” is about the personal circumstances of such an act. And when the song “When That Great Ship Went Down” appears, it’s very clear that this is a take on the sinking of the Titanic that seizes the chance to warn about the political iceberg on which the American ship of state has foundered, not in some overblown sentimentalized Hollywood way, but as apocalyptic prophecy!

One reading of the *Anthology* in fact is as an occult or hermetic document. The songs included therein often call up the supernatural: with British Child ballads from the previous century (reimagined in the hills of Appalachia) about birds that refuse to help knights in distress; other tunes which feature demons lurking in spooky suicidal nightmares; stories of men who shed their masks to shapeshift into moles, lizards, and rabbits in order to tell you their gripping tales; or eerie cookoo birds who must be supplicated at any cost. These creatures are joined here by larger than life archetypes of the ramblin’ life embodied in crusty hobo blues-

men, like Henry Thomas, playing guitar while accompanying himself on a set of panpipes (an instrument dating back to the dawn of time) held in a harmonica holder around his neck—the apotheosis of blues mythology.

Moreover, in the *Anthology*, one can detect a surrealist strategy on Smith's part for releasing the Marvelous from the fetters of the massification of American culture in the '50s. After all, in addition to being a self-taught folklorist, Smith was a noted surrealist filmmaker. His was a relentless quest for what was beneath the surface of America's hegemonic cultural façade: the unconscious and the repressed; desire, fear, and abandon. So it is that Furry Lewis's lengthy rendition of "Cassie Jones" evokes what folklorist/master guitarist John Fahey calls in the liner notes of the *Anthology* reissue, "the most surreal version of the 'Casey Jones' theme, which keeps digressing into talk of other things and Freudian dream imagery." Lewis himself was noted for his dark surrealist humor in Paul Garon's seminal book *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*. Likewise, Chicago Surrealist Group stalwart Garon has celebrated other *Anthology* blues musicians in his writings, from Charlie Patton, as the Masked Marvel, with his unbridled sexuality, to the sexually-drenched dream imagery of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Sleepy John Estes, and the Memphis Jug Band, and tipped his hat to the raucous humor of flight evidenced in a tune by Canon's Jug Stompers.

Beyond the *Anthology*, taking the blues roots of American musical hybrids one step further, the music of Elvis Presley is sometimes acknowledged as being an ingenious or insidious (take your pick) combination of the blues and country music—which came to be known as rock 'n' roll—reaching a plateau in the long tradition of American minstrelsy that has now moved beyond the blues to swallow rap and spit up Eminem. In relation to Elvis, the example which is usually cited is his first Sun single, with one side a note for note cover of bluesman Arnold "Big Boy" Cruddup's "That's All Right Mama" and the other an updating of "Blue Moon of Kentucky," originally a bluegrass tune by none other than Bill Monroe.

What is now revealed by the previous discussion is that the style of music on that pivotal recording was in fact a combination not of "white" music on one side and "black" music on the other as we have been led to believe, but of music that was even more decidedly African American than was originally imagined by many of the most astute scholarly observers. For the side assumed to be exclusively "white" was itself the product of interracial cross-pollination via Arnold Schultz.

Internationally-speaking, in evaluating the shifting balance between American imposition and African diasporic affinity as it relates to specific musical instances, one must question the degree to which even affinity itself is imposed by the hegemonic position of African American music in the diasporic marketplace. Within and beyond that market, a related issue is the predominant worldwide distribution of what are typically the most commercial kinds of African American music. Certainly, other African diasporic musics have had an impact on musical developments on the African continent. Cuban rumba, Trinidadian calypso, and Jamaican reggae/dancehall are the best known examples. However, a chicken and egg complexity still remains since these diasporic musics in turn have been influenced in their origins by African American jazz, soul, funk, and hip hop.

In apartheid South Africa, the African National Congress saw jazz as progressive in its ability to transcend ethnic divisions among blacks and create solidarity in the liberation struggle. Often thought of as apolitical in the cultural context of the States, jazz has long been inspirational in its identification with freedom, racial dignity, and interracial harmony in South Africa, where it was re-Africanized and politicized as part of the anti-imperialist strategy to end apartheid. The real question being raised in relation to the issue of cultural appropriation then is not about the validity of musical sharing—which is inevitable and can, in whole or in part, be liberating or debilitating in its effects—but about the nature and degree of reciprocity involved in cultural exchange, particularly when such cross-pollination happens within the context of the African diaspora.

Diasporic thinking becomes a more valuable tool of analysis when African American music is put in perspective as but one form of creolized African-based music. Black music is only considered minority music in a US context because those of African descent are a minority of the population, but on a global scale, African American music has had a major impact because of a combination of diasporic consciousness and the inequalities of the global music industry which give any American music a privileged position in the world market.

Theoretically, if the playing field were more level, African American music would be more likely to appear on the world stage as an integral part of, rather than the dominant force in, Black Atlantic musical production. Such an egalitarian vision involves a strategy of hastening the breakdown of the overwhelmingly one way flow emanating from the US to the world metropolises in the interests of creating a grassroots diasporic

network. Like any cross-cultural musical exchange—diasporic or otherwise—it is the dynamics of the cultural contact—rather than the contact itself—which are ultimately important. In this sense, a more nuanced approach to cultural imperialism allows us to see the process of diasporic musical sharing as occasionally reciprocal and horizontal or even multivalent and, in political terms, as contested terrain.

No longer is Africa just a symbolic or imagined place for African American jazz musicians, as when Miles Davis recorded Sonny Rollins' "Airegin" (Nigeria backwards) in 1954. Rather, the Motherland is fast becoming a focal point for more direct collaborations. Before his death, Miles acknowledged the influence of the highly political Afrobeat music of Nigerian Fela Kuti on his later music, just as Fela had himself reported being influenced by Miles during his brief stay (1969-70) in the United States as a young man. Miles' former sideman, John Coltrane, recorded the tune "Tunji" with his own quartet in 1962, in honor of his friend, Nigerian master drummer, Olatunji, with whom he had hoped to visit Africa one day. Though he did incorporate African musical elements into his own jazz compositions on occasion, he never made it to Africa himself due to his untimely death.

Yet, as far back as 1969, tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, along with Clifford Thornton (cornet), Grachan Moncur III (trombone), Dave Burrell (piano), Alan Silva (bass), Sonny Murray (drums), and surrealist poet Ted Joans, recorded a live album at the Pan African Festival in Algiers during the Black Power era, improvising freely with a host of Algerian and Touareg musicians. Joans' poem for the occasion was appropriately entitled, "We Have Come Back." A couple of years later in 1971, the Sun Ra Arkestra jammed in Egypt with such members of the Cairo Jazz Band and the Cairo Free Jazz Ensemble as Egyptian drummer Salah Ragab and German percussionist Hartmut Geerken. Geerken, later organized a tour of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia in 1985 as part of a free jazz trio which also included Art Ensemble of Chicago drummer, Famadou Don Moye (who got to meet his chosen namesake, Guinean master drummer Famadou Konaté), and tenor saxophonist John Tchicai, who is himself partly of Congolese heritage. During their journey they exchanged musical energies with local musicians—not only in Conakry, Freetown, and Monrovia—but in scattered bush villages along the way, with the results eventually compiled on a recording dubbed *The African Tapes*. And the diasporic wheel is still in spin as the younger generation enters the picture via rap.

With the ascendance of conscious Afrocentric rap on the world stage, musical relationships with African musicians are increasingly based on mutual respect. In some cases, American-based artists are not the leaders but rather the guests within an outernational context that is not strictly confined to the narrow boundaries of nation state—or lowest common denominator transnational corporate marketing strategies. Such was the case with *Red, Hot and Riot*, a Fela tribute and African AIDS benefit recording from 2002. Along with the funkiness of the music itself, part of Fela's appeal to a younger diasporic generation is based on the militance of his resistance lyrics which is rooted in what Michael Veal calls his "vague anarchism, ultimately opposed to all forms of authority, hierarchy, and official organizations (the exception being that which Fela exercised within his personal sphere)" (Veal, p. 254). Just as jazzmen like Lester Bowie and Roy Ayers once sat in with Fela and his Africa 70 band, now, in recent years, US-based funk musicians like George Clinton and rappers like Nas, Timbaland, Common, Mos Def, Blackalicious, and the Roots have sampled Fela's riffs and both The Roots and Common have collaborated with Fela's son, Femi Kuti and his band The Positive Force.

Fela was an uncompromising opponent of cultural imperialism and its "colonial mentality." While his own music was heavily influenced by James Brown whose polyrhythmic approach struck a diasporic chord, he remained very much his own man refusing to collaborate unless he retained control of both the recording process and the aesthetic outcome. Since his death, his son Femi has sought to situate the terms of the diasporic cultural exchange process between himself and his African American collaborators in a setting that increases the possibilities for collaboration while maintaining the cultural integrity of his music's "Africaness." Rather than Femi simply appearing as a sideman on a Roots or Common record date, it is Afrobeat music with which they all interact by implicitly recognizing the Africaness of funk, the funk roots of Afrobeat, and their confluence in a hip hop context.

*So, welcome to the Rebel Corner where Femi Kuti duets with Bob Marley on "Africa Unite;" where the MC5 morphs into Tribe 8 and holds down Theodor Adorno as Harry Smith strips him of all his high culture pretensions; where Phil Ochs is cut down from his gold lame cross by Chris Cutler and returned to Dar Es Salaam to sit in on a session with Robert Wyatt on talking drums, as Peetie Wheatstraw, the High Sheriff From Hell, poetically ignites a piano, while Ruben Blades fans the flames by clapping his hands in clave; where Pat Andrade and Chuck D lay down a ballistic bassline for*



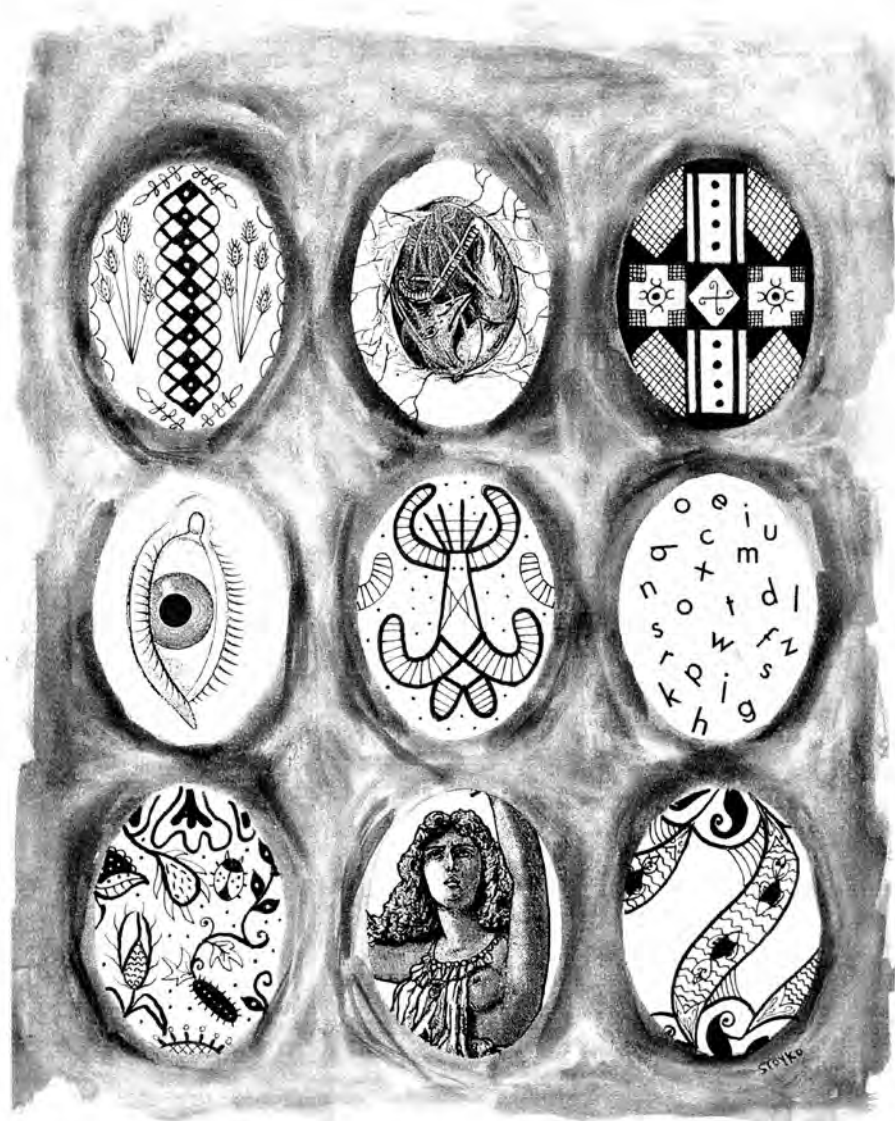
*a Raging Black Indian war dance on John Wayne's Head; where Utah Phillips laughs uproariously as Negativland teaches Mr. Block "The ABCs of Anarchism," Chumbawamba-style; and where William Parker still searches for the "raincoat in the river."*

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—Cathy Stoyko

## Finding Your Voice

The following piece was commissioned by the Cascadia Media Alliance on the subject of “Media and Democracy,” in both text form and as part of an audio recording for free radio broadcasting. In the context of this piece, which was first presented at the kickoff event for the Reclaim the Media convergence held in Seattle in September 2002, I posed the question: How might a radical media politics that recognizes the worth of both surrealism and anarchism be created?

Like anarchists, surrealists demand the impossible, pushing beyond the already existing boundaries of the possible into the uncharted terrain of the Marvelous. Instead of confining themselves to the pragmatic politics of the possible, which are rooted in a miserabilist acceptance of so-called “realistic” limitations, surrealists seek to create fault lines in our consciousness about what might indeed be possible in a world of unfettered imagination. Given the depth of what surrealists demand—the transformation of reality itself—their strategies are, like those of anarchists, revolutionary rather than reformist. Surrealism is not populist, and its demand for an end to the artificial dichotomy between dream and reality cannot be subsumed in the rhetoric of social democracy or recuperated in the bureaucratic language of corporations or regulatory agencies like the National Association of Broadcasters or the Federal Communications Commission.

Here, then, is my statement in full:

As an anarchist, my affinity with democracy is not about voting for someone to better represent us, but rather taking action to directly represent ourselves. Just as I don’t consent to being ruled by some politician, no matter how Green, Left, or Libertarian, I don’t trust some professional media talking head to frame my reality for me. My conception of how media and democracy are related involves a radical critique of both. I know a surrealist poet named Jayne Cortez, who says

in one of her poems:

“Find Your own voice & use it.

Use your own voice & find it.”

So if we are to take the science that Jayne is droppin’ on us seriously, we’ve got to lift our collective voices against injustice and on behalf of our dreams for a world of freedom. And when we do this together, we are each stronger for it because we find our own voices in the process of passionately using them in our own chosen ways to resist oppression and to insist on liberation.

Now when we compare this radical vision of direct democracy to the miserabilism of our currently mediated lives, we must inevitably confront the gap between the fatally compromised illusions that comprise what is called political reality and our own brightly burning desires for personal and social autonomy and an end to hierarchy and domination.

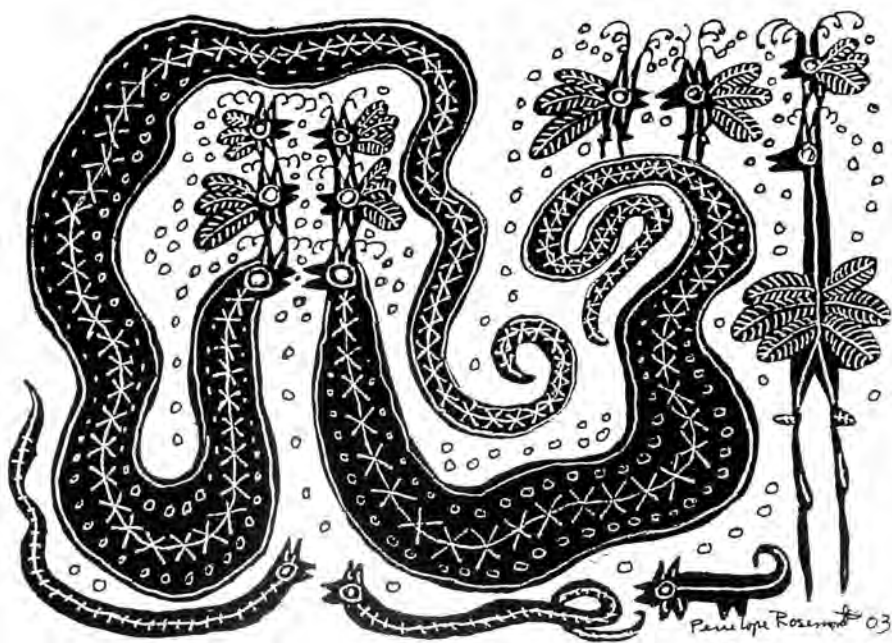
It is then that we begin to question our socially assigned roles as passive citizen/spectators and to seize control over the means of cultural production, representation, and distribution which today are largely the domain of the corporate and public media giants.

In so doing, we emerge from the velvet prison of consumerism and market demographics and become alive to revolutionary possibilities outside the one world of global capitalism. As we awaken from our media-induced trance, we unleash the insurgent power of the creative imagination, shake off the shackles of the reality police, and break the silence of cynicism and despair.

“Find your own voice & use it.

Use your own voice & find it.”





—Penelope Rosemont, “Dawn in Tunisia”



## Firespitter: Jayne Cortez & the Poetics of Diasporic Resistance

Revolution decorating its drum  
with memory grease made from Nat Turner's body  
—Jayne Cortez,  
“Drums Everywhere Drums,” 1977

As the dub poets say, “word soun ave power!” Though it is sometimes thought of as a strictly Jamaican idiom, Dominican-born dub poet Ras Mo once told me,

In Dominica, we can't find the term “dub poetry,” but rather “people's performance poetry.” In the Eastern Caribbean, when you day “dub,” people relate it to Jamaican reggae and dancehall DJs, but “dub poetry,” “performance poetry,” “rhythm poetry,” “rapso” are all based on the same form from different islands.

Sakolsky,  
*Sounding Off*, p. 257

Jamaican dub poet Mutabaruka elaborated on this diasporic theme in relation to the music associated with dub poetry at the first international gathering of dub poets in Toronto in 1993 by saying, “the commonality is not jazz, reggae or even dub, but the African oral tradition” (Sakolsky, *Sounding Off*, p. 258).

More recently, the 2004 International Dub Poetry Festival, held again in Toronto, noted in its brochure: “Dub poetry speaks clearly and emphatically for those who seek to create a better world by influencing politics with their poetics. Through their performance stance, their ideas and active engagement, dub poets are catalysts of change.” Pioneering

Jamaican dub poet Malachi Smith, who now lives in Miami, summed up the power of the genre during his comments at that year's "Dub Activism" panel by saying, "the word can be a bullet or a hole to plant a seed."

Much has been written on the value of creating an African consciousness in relation to national liberation movements located outside of the African continent, particularly in the Caribbean. Dub poetry, as a decolonizing agent, extends the connection beyond that of the nation-state to the Motherland. By so doing, it allows for the creation of a new cognitive map which is at once rooted in Africa and at the same time is dynamic enough to encompass not only two-way flows between the scattered peoples of the African diaspora and Africa itself, but the anarchic interactions of diasporic peoples with one another based on both the commonality and the diversity of their diasporic experiences. In charting the poetics of struggle along diasporic lines, I will draw upon the work of African American poet Jayne Cortez in relation to dub poetry.

In this regard, I want to point out her affinity with the dub poetry movement. Though usually not thought of as a dub poet, she fits the definition of one at its most diasporically expansive. As established dub poet Afua Cooper has said,

Because of the reggae influence, dub poets traditionally have privileged reggae music, but jazz, rhythm and blues, calypso, African drumming styles, rap and Afro-Latin styles have been used by many dub poets, in the production and performance of their work. The inclusion of these forms underscores dub poetry's open-endedness, flexibility, vast potential and possibilities. (Cooper, p. 1)

It is within this realm of diasporic possibility that Lillian Allen has embraced Jayne Cortez as a "poet of resistance" (Allen, p. 13) whose work is intrinsically linked to the dub poetry project of which the former is a leading light.

While many current discussions of the confluence of African American forms of musical expression and dub poetry are often limited to rap, or, more generally, to the spoken word movement, Cortez has always been someone whose musical/poetic sensibility refuses to be confined to a single national identity. Because of her poetry's "yard to yard" cosmopolitanism, she is at home anywhere in the African diaspora. In this sense, the body of her work encompasses most of Afua Cooper's

above checklist of diasporic musics with a combined spiritual, cultural, and political depth that is quite astonishing.

The poems she has recorded with her band the Firespitters demonstrate a diversity of diasporic contexts. A partial listing of genres ranges from African American jazz and hoodoo blues to Afro-Cuban son/lucumi/abakua on to Brazilian samba/capoeira/candomblé—and then returns to the African drum in its many incarnations. Starting with that same drum in mind, here are some of the titles of her recordings: “If The Drum Is a Woman,” “You Know (For the people who speak the you know language),” “I Got The Blue-Ooze,” “Taking the Blues Back Home,” “I See Chano Pozo,” “Chocolate,” “Samba is Power,” “I and I (For Michael Smith),” and “Drums Everywhere Drums.” These are all no holds barred poems, which not only use and improvise upon the rhythms of, but also are *about*, the music of the diaspora.

In terms of the poet’s relationship to the music, as Cortez herself sees it, “the poet becomes the band” (Cortez in Sakolsky, 2002, p. 661). In this sense, she herself embodies the “Firespitter” persona. The case that I want to make here is not only for Jayne Cortez as a dub poet because of her concern for what she calls “the poetic use of music” (Cortez in Sakolsky, 2002, p. 661), but for dub poetry as a fully diasporic idiom. This is true not only in terms of the international diversity of the artists represented in the movement as a whole, but the opportunity which the form provides for diversity *within* an individual dub poet’s oeuvre. A poet like Cortez opens up a variety of creole identities to their core and connects the African diasporic dots before our very ears. Celebrating Cortez in this manner, of course, is not meant to disparage those dub poetry artists who concentrate on plumbing the depths of a single creole identity with which they associate themselves based on where in the diaspora they or their forbears are located. Rather, I want to point out Cortez’s impressive ability to make her poetry dance to a wide array of African and African-derived drumbeats.

Moving beyond a narrowly-defined national identity, we enter the global stage where an African-based identity is itself constructed of a composite of diasporic influences which can’t be subsumed in any one language, musical or otherwise. Cortez’s poetry treats all hybrid diasporic locations as potentially radical. Defiantly eschewing the lowest common denominator monotony of “worldbeat” blandness, Cortez never forgets that the historical connection to Africa is not just about

style, but the blood of kinship, oppression, and revolt. As fellow poet Franklin Rosemont delineates the poetic context that animates her work,

Poetry is the language of freedom—language at its freeist, highest, and wildest—and therefore the single greatest threat to the *language of Power*. And that's why courageously uncompromising poets like Jayne Cortez are truly *indispensable*. Refusing to “have a nice day,” this is poetry that prefers to knock the lid off, and lets a future you might like to live in take over.

(Rosemont, p. 24)

For Cortez, the blues, though now often simplistically thought of as generically American, can only be fully understood as an African diasporic music. Any attempt to enter the blues tradition without a diasporic grounding in its hoodoo essence can only produce a music that for all its surface gloss and technical wizardry is empty of meaning.

In this regard, I'd like to draw upon the lyrics of the title track on her *Taking The Blues Back Home* cd:

I'm taking the blues back home  
I'm taking the blues back to where  
the blues stealers won't go

I'm taking the blues back home  
because the blues stealers like to steal  
when they think they have nothing of their own  
I'm taking the blues back home  
I'm taking the blues back to the fire of the spirits  
I'm taking the blues back to the damp undergrowth  
I'm taking the blues back to where  
the blues stealers won't go  
I'm taking the blues back home

I'm taking the blues out of the mouth of the stealers  
I'm taking the blues out of the western stream  
I'm taking the blues back before somebody sings  
“Ain't nobody's business if I steal your blues”  
I'm taking the blues back home  
I'm taking the blues back home

before Robert Johnson comes from  
the graveyard to say  
“The blues has been crapped on”  
I’m taking the blues back to the crossroad  
I’m taking the blues back to the bush  
I’m taking the blues back to the place  
where the blues stealers won’t go  
I’m taking the blues back home before  
Langston Hughes returns to say

“They’ve taken my blues again and gone”  
I’m taking the blues back home  
I’m the owner of the blues  
& I’m taking the blues back home  
The blues that came to me from the slave dungeons  
the blues that came to me from the death trails  
the blues that came to me from my ancestors  
the blues that came to me in a spell that tells me  
through birth that I’m the owner of the blues  
from a long time ago  
I’m the owner of the blues from a long  
long long long time ago  
I’m the owner of the blues  
& even if somebody says  
they have a right to sing the blues  
I’m still the owner of the secrets in the blues  
from a long time ago  
I’m the owner of the blues  
& even if somebody pays to play & use the blues  
I’m still the owner of the blues  
from a long time ago  
I’m the owner of the blues  
& I’m taking the blues back home  
I’m taking the blues back to where  
the blues stealers won’t go  
I’m taking the blues back home  
I’m taking the blues back home

(Cortez, 2002, pp. 86-87)

Aside from her Afrodiasporic credentials as a dub poet in an African American idiom like the blues, Cortez is widely recognized as a surrealist poet. As Cortez has said of her friend Leon Damas, who she called “the Red Pepper Poet” with a “bullroarer tongue,” one could likewise say of her:

Damas was like his poems: quick, precise, sharp, ironic, intense, humorous, confrontational, nonconforming, on the edge, not for commercial use, and not for sale. His eyes were focused on the future; his feet were pointed toward Africa. We encounter him as Negritude in Motion.

(Cortez in Sakolsky, 2002, p. 192)

The word “Negritude” itself was coined by renowned Martiniquan surrealist poet Aimé Césaire, who, with his French Guyanese comrade and fellow surrealist poet Leon Damas, was an editor of *L'Étudiant Noir*, the publication where the term “Negritude” was used for the first time in 1935. In fact, surrealism’s fervent embrace of the Marvelous in African culture, and Jayne Cortez’s breathtakingly unsubmissive poetic fusillades aimed at what she refers to as “whitestream” American culture, is what motivated the impassioned tribute to her by pivotal surrealist Franklin Rosemont quoted earlier. Moreover, it is no coincidence that the original Paris Surrealist Group eschewed French national chauvinism and found an affinity with anti-colonial poets like Césaire and Damas.

As Cortez has said of Damas, in a framework that resonates with the aesthetic concerns of dub poetry,

He created his language from the natural tones of Black French Guyana, Black Paris. His message concerned with the experience of the Black world is condensed into a high voltage of metaphors, connotations, imagery, irony, and allusions. The subject is language, his own poetic identity. He interconnected inflections of his voice into his own written drum language. He developed his own spontaneous form of rhythm patterns and accents. Damas used to say, “Negritude has many fathers but only one mother.”

(Cortez in Sakolsky, 2002, pp. 192-193)

It is in the same sense that Cortez can cast her friend the late Jamaican dub poet Mikey Smith in her poem “I and I” as a “Wolof Stagolee,” at

once combining Caribbean, African, and African American diasporic lineages in one powerful outlaw image.

However, as Cortez knows, because of her empathy with the Negritude poets, when dub poetry is constituted only of the African diasporic experience as seen through an Anglophone lens, whether Caribbean, North American, or English, it neglects the diversity of its patrimony. What she seeks in her poetry—perhaps in part because of the influence of her own Latino ancestry—is to bust out of these Anglophone constraints. In “I Got The Blue-Ooze,” she chants down Babylon to the tune of:

I got the five hundred year black hostage  
colonialism never stops blue-ooze  
I got the francophone anglophone germanophone  
lusophone telephone blue-ooze

(Cortez, 2002, pp. 60)

In all seriousness, but with pointed humor, she urges African peoples through her poetry to break down the barriers that artificially separate and divide Africans in categorical terms by the language of the colonizer. This approach is not meant to simplistically deny the varieties of diasporic experience or to ignore the complexity of the different forms of European colonial subjugation, but rather to plant the poetic seeds for an outernational struggle that exists beyond language barriers and in advance of the limitations of the neocolonial nation-state.

Identifying herself as a surrealist within the Black Arts Movement, Cortez imagines a different reality and poetically moves towards it. As noted African American historian Robin DG Kelley has put it in his most surrealist book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*,

Jayne Cortez dreams anti-imperialist dreams. Today, in an era when many young people believe that surrealism is merely an aesthetic or hip style, Cortez exemplifies the revolutionary commitment that has always been at the heart of the black radical imagination. To call this “protest poetry” misses the point. It is a complete revolt, a clarion call for a new way of life.

(Kelley, 2002, pp. 187 and 189)

Taking a cue from Kelley in this regard, I’d like to end by showcasing a classic 1982 poem which Cortez recorded with the Firespitters on the album of the same name entitled, “There It Is:”



My friend  
they don't care  
if you're an individualist  
a leftist      a rightist  
a shithead or a snake

They will try to exploit you  
absorb you                      confine you  
disconnect you   isolate you  
or kill you

And you will disappear into your own rage  
into your own insanity  
into your own poverty  
into a word a phrase a slogan a cartoon  
and then ashes

The ruling class will tell you that  
there is no ruling class  
as they organize their liberal supporters into  
white supremist lynch mobs  
organize their children into  
ku klux klan gangs  
organize their police into killer cops  
organize their propaganda into  
a device to ossify us with angel dust  
pre-occupy us with western symbols and  
african hair styles  
innoculate us with hate  
institutionalize us with ignorance  
hypnotize us with a monotonous sound designed  
to make us evade reality and stomp our lives away  
And we are programmed to self destruct  
to fragment  
to get buried under covert intelligence operations of  
unintelligent committees impulsed toward death  
And there it is

The enemies polishing their penises between  
oil wells at the pentagon  
the bulldozers leaping into demolition dances  
the old folks dying of starvation

the informers wearing out shoes looking for crumbs  
the lifeblood of the earth almost dead in  
the greedy mouth of imperialism  
And my friend  
they don't care  
if you're an individualist  
a leftist      a rightist  
a shithhead or a snake

They will spray you with  
a virus of legionaire's disease  
fill your nostrils with  
the swine flu of their arrogance  
stuff your body into a tampon of  
toxic shock syndrome  
try to pump all the resources of the world  
into their own veins  
and fly off into the wild blue yonder to  
pollute another planet

And if we don't fight  
if we don't resist  
if we don't organize and unify and  
get the power to control our own lives  
Then we will wear  
the exaggerated look of captivity  
the stylized look of submission  
the bizzare look of suicide  
the dehumanized look of fear  
and the decomposed look of repression  
forever and ever and ever  
And there it is

("There It Is" 1984, pp. 68-70)

There it is, indeed, unless we "spit fire" and burn this sucker to the ground!

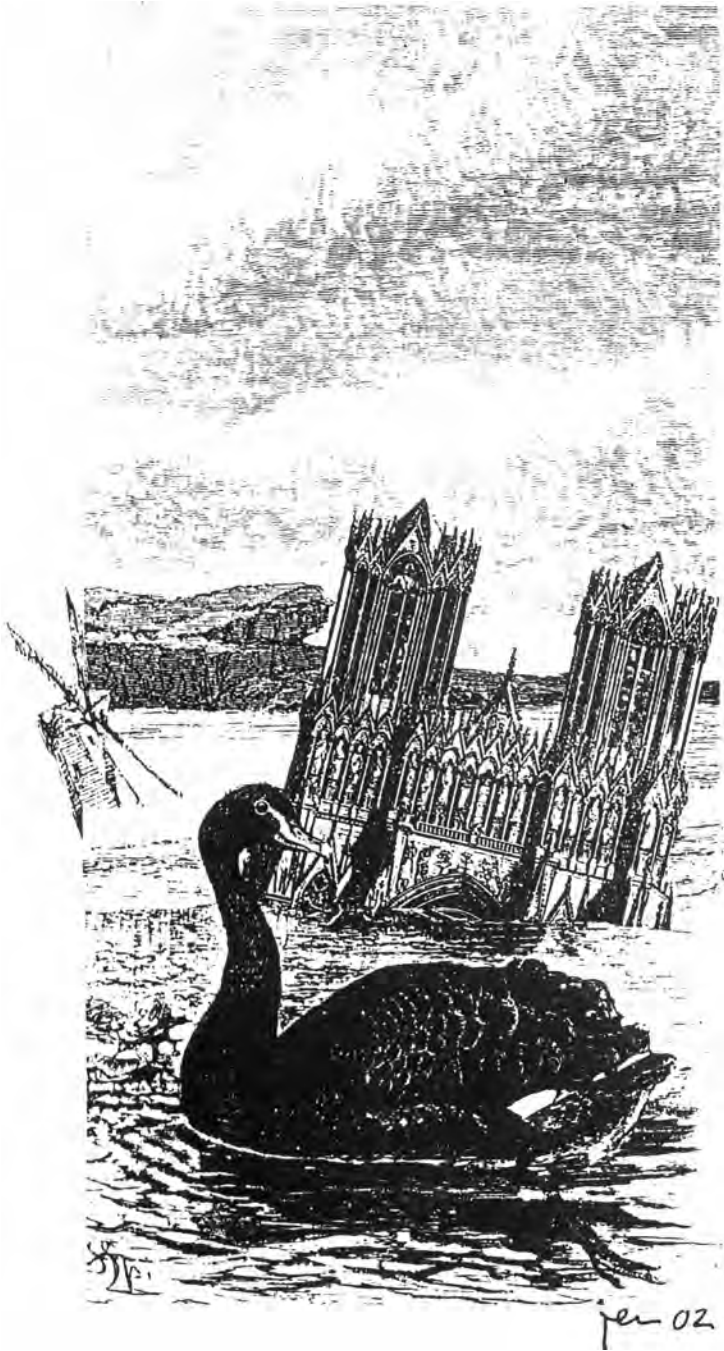
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—Jen Besemer, "Black Swan Victory"

# Anarchy in a Diasporic Key

Oye

I'm in the presence of ancestor

Chano Pozo

Chano connector of two worlds

*Lucumi Abakwa Lucumi Abakwa*

—Jayne Cortez,

“I See Chano Pozo,” 1984

**I**magine diasporic anarchy! While not all diasporas are African, I would like to focus upon the affinities between the African diaspora and the anarchist movement, both of which involve non-statist forms of solidarity, by using music as a touchstone.

I am employing the term “diaspora” here in Paul Gilroy’s dynamic sense of the “plural richness of black cultures in different parts of the world in counterpoint to their common sensibilities—both those residually inherited from Africa and those generated from the special bitterness of new world racial slavery” (Gilroy, pp. 80-81). This kind of diasporic approach lends itself to a conceptualization of anarchy based on cultural diversity and unity—as well as resistance to the ongoing colonial project now known as globalization.

While not meant to imply that the only alternative to the schemes of transnational capitalism comes with diasporic affinities, or that all diasporic peoples will or must choose to identify with such affinities, a formulation that is both diasporic and anarchic offers one example of affinity-based relationships with the cultural potential to subvert the atomization of the global market economy. What makes this subversion possible is the creation of a non-elitist cosmopolitanism that remains in harmony with a grass roots sensibility.

By definition, cosmopolitanism posits worldliness free from national

limitations or attachments. While such an idea is compatible with anarchism, in an African historical context, cosmopolitanism has often been the province of westernized colonial elites and so has often been thought of as Eurocentric and divisive in relation to the national liberation struggle. Given the horrors of colonialism, the desire for independence is certainly understandable. But where does that leave anarchist cosmopolitans who question the nation state itself? What about the creation of a diasporic cosmopolitanism unsparingly stripped of Eurocentrism, yet critical of the neocolonialist forms of elitism that so often accompany flag independence?

Such a radical cosmopolitanism would be differentiated from mere westernization, and its generative power would not automatically be focused on the rise of a neocolonial nation state operating within the context of capitalist globalization.

As maverick cultural theorist George Lipsitz has explained it, “The existence of the African diaspora functions throughout the world as a crucial force for opening up cultural, social and political space for struggles over identity, autonomy and power” (pp. 27-28). What then defines the anarchist potential of those diasporic linkages unrestrained by the nation state—yet undiluted by the market swill of global neoliberalism?

Using African American jazz as a reference point, let’s take a musical journey from the Mississippi to the Zambezi and back again. In 2000, veteran free jazz trumpeter/composer/improviser Wadada Leo Smith participated in an African diasporic recording project with the “Lion of Zimbabwe,” Thomas Mapfumo. Smith, one of the earliest jazz musicians to write on “world music” theory, united his band N’Da Kulture with the music of Mapfumo’s band The Blacks Unlimited on a small independent aNOnym label recording entitled *Dreams and Secrets* during the Zimbabwean’s current US residency in Oregon.

When Mapfumo first created “chimurenga” music in the early 70s by reconfiguring traditional Shona mbira tunes or village dance drumming for an electric guitar band in the context of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle, he was not arbitrarily grafting European ideas onto indigenous music or vice versa, but selectively drawing upon creole musics with ties to the African diaspora (reggae, Latin, rhythm and blues, soul, jazz, and rock) in a cosmopolitan context—just as many younger African musicians, such as Femi Kuti, do today with hip hop. This recording brings that original diasporic connection full circle.

Mapfumo is still a politically-engaged artist, and he has continued to



be critical of post-independence corruption. His 2003 independent production *Toi Toi* is steeped in protest in relation to the present situation in Zimbabwe, and his 2005 online release *Rise Up* was predictably banned from Zimbabwean state radio as soon as it hit the streets in Harare record bars and film markets.

As he put it in a recent newspaper interview, “I’m in the history books. School children learn about me. They talk about me, what I did during the liberation struggle, the part my music played. They tell the people that kind of history. And yet they don’t want to play my music on the radio” (in Guy Dixon, p. R3).

For such candid statements, he has earned the wrath of the Zimbabwean government and been pushed into exile, where he has collaborated with his diasporic counterparts in the States. While Mapfumo might not consider himself or his music to be anarchist, his situation can be instructive when placed in an anarchist context that not only challenges capitalism—but also confronts nation state solutions to colonialism.

In the past, Mapfumo, as a cosmopolitan recording artist, has at times operated as a marginal figure within the market-driven context of the transnational record industry. Under such problematic circumstances, we might ask how he was able to retain his political integrity and appeal to both his local and cosmopolitan audiences. In doing so, he had to grapple with the music industry’s “world beat” version of global cosmopolitanism in which African music often has no more connection to a politically-engaged diasporic consciousness than is allowed by the demographics of niche marketing—with its emphasis on cultural appropriation, exoticism, and related stereotypes of tribalism and spectacular rebellion. Compare such a global plantation system approach to the dream of a decentralized “yard to yard” diasporic network capable of reconfiguring production and distribution or, at its most utopian, creatively bypassing both national and global media conglomerates entirely.

Let’s now move from Africa to the Caribbean. Given Cuba’s relative post-revolutionary isolation from the onslaughts of the global music industry and US cultural imperialism, I decided to visit there in the early 1990s to study Afro-Cuban music. During the 1970s and 80s, I had luckily been able to receive Cuban records in the mail from a friend in Poland in exchange for Chicago blues sides. Because of the Cold War, Cuban music was as unavailable in Illinois where I lived as the blues was in East Bloc cities like Warsaw or New York City salsa records were in Cuba. (I now live in Canada, where it is quite normal to visit Cuba, but,

when I lived in the States, it was decidedly abnormal, even suspect, for a US citizen to fly to Havana.)

My visit as a journalist for *The Beat* magazine was prior to the sonic tourism generated by Ry Cooder's "discovery" of Cuban music and the subsequent "Buena Vista Social Club" phenomenon. Upon visiting, what I found in Cuba was, as one might expect, a more direct connection to African culture than is the case in the States. The Motherland spiritual traditions and practices of Santería were widely dispersed among Cubans of African descent, drawing heavily on African ritual music and using the Yoruba language rather than Spanish to invoke the African divinities renamed "santos" or "orishas" in the colonial context.

What's more, even non-Africans in the Cuban population were familiar with these traditions. The late African American cultural democracy activist Larry Abrams once explained this situation in *Griot Magazine* by touching on his own visit to Cuba in 1989:

"I was returning late one night from a gig at a high-rise beach resort outside Havana where my friends in a band called Afro-Jazz played two sets a night for the mostly Latin American tourists. At that time of morning, the bus was loaded with hotel workers returning home to the city, along with the musicians. As I have seen happen in the US at such times, when weary and bored from the long trip, people began to sing puerile folk songs of the kind that everyone knows from grade school, like our 'Oh! Suzanna.' Only these were from the folk tradition of Spain. The bus was about half-and-half, whites and blacks, and I had already become accustomed to seeing this kind of spontaneous unity between the races that I have rarely seen in the US, especially among the working class, so I was not too surprised at this strategy to lighten the ennui of the long trip back to the city. But then someone, perhaps one of the band members, began to tap a syncopated rhythm on the back of a seat, and soon others had joined in the drumming, and to my utter astonishment, there arose from the very same throats that had been indoctrinated with the Spanish folk songs, the haunting and qualitatively different chanting of Yoruba songs to the *Ori-shas*. And everyone, whites and blacks, seemed to know the words! There is no cultural equivalent to that in the US." (Abrams, pp. 68-69)

As the veil is increasingly lifted and Cuban culture becomes more visibly African in nature, African Americans are more and more realizing that while their governments might not like each other much, there is a diasporic connection between Cuba and the US that cannot be denied. Many years ago, during the AfroCuban phase of the bebop era, African

American jazz bassist Al McKibbon explained his fascination with the music of the Cuban drummer Chano Pozo, featured with the Dizzy Gillespie band. He succinctly remarked to his fellow band members, who had teasingly referred to McKibbon as a Cuban wannabe, “No, man, I don’t want to become Cuban, this is black” (p. 143).

How an increasingly widespread diasporic awareness will play itself out on the world stage in the future is anybody’s guess. However, in trying to conceptualize a decolonized diasporic world, beyond the confines of the nation state and the market economy, we might ask ourselves the following questions:

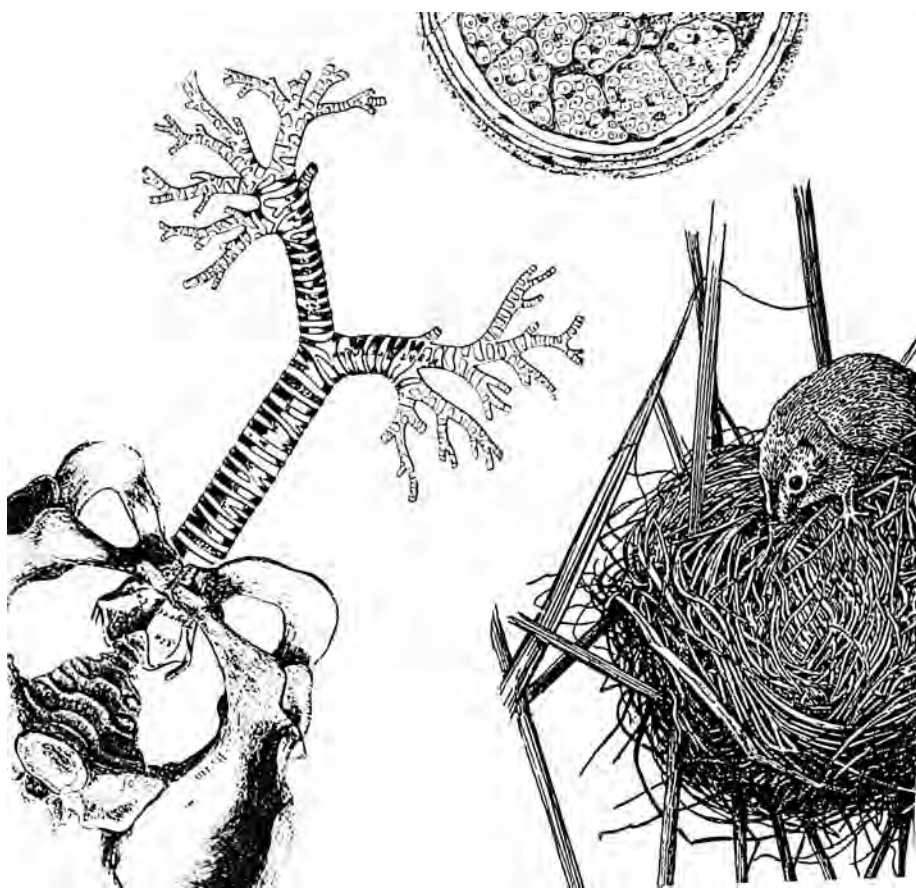
What if diasporic cosmopolitanism was not linked to Eurocentrism, elitism, capitalism, the nation state, or globalization hierarchies? How would such an unhinging change not only the production and distribution of diasporic musics, but the nature of cosmopolitanism itself? What affinities with anarchism might emerge given an anti-authoritarian cosmopolitanism rooted in an oppositional diasporic consciousness?

Can we envision stateless forms of autonomy which avoid the trap of capitalist globalization as defined by World Bank/IMF/WTO development schemes or flatly refuse the lure of globalization in toto? In the process of asking such questions, anarchists—whatever their chosen cultural identity or assigned racial classification—might start to fashion a more culturally nuanced anarchist theory and open the door to an increasingly diverse worldwide movement.

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—Ruth Oppenheim-Rothschild

# Surrealist May Day Greetings!

A day devoted to the memory of life before wage  
slavery, an entire month devoted to dreaming of orcas;  
a festival in honor of the phallus and the  
clitoris, of the orgasm; the opening of an academy  
devoted to the Erogenous Zones; a day set aside for  
the public mourning of Life's Errors and the Great  
Mistakes of the Twentieth Century, a day devoted to  
International Forums on Masturbation, a month to  
honor habanero peppers, stinging nettles, ginger tea, and  
Belgian beer; an early spring devoted to the cultivation of  
the impossible; an entire century to condemn the  
WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, the Bastille and the  
hangman's noose; a decade devoted to the Erotic  
Arts; a day to melt cannons down into wine goblets,  
water pipes, and cowbells; a wild month of Midnight Balls,  
Hot Fiddles, Sawdust Dancefloors, Free Jazz and  
Freestyle Rap Poetry; a day of rest to welcome the Herring Run,  
another devoted to Oystercatcher mating rituals, still another to  
celebrate the hoodoo magic of Winged Frogs and  
the Tree Frog Radio insurrection,  
and a lifetime to honor the slain Haymarket Martyrs  
whose death in 1886 did not stifle the bright fire of  
Anarchy that burned brilliantly in their eyes.

ALIVE/AWAKE/AFLAME

WE ARE

UNITED IN MAD LOVE

\*Inspired by a succulent passage in Rikki Ducornet's  
*The Fan-Makers Inquisition*  
(New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1999).



—Franklin Rosemont, “Many Moons: Homage to George Herriman”

# Marvelous Freedom Vigilance of Desire

At sixteen, I decided my life would not be what others intended it to be. Having always disdained masters who act like slaves as well as slaves eager to slip into the skins of masters, I confess that the ordinary conflicts between men and women have been of very little concern to me. My sympathy goes rather to those who desert the roles that society assigns them.

—Anne Le Brun,  
“Drop Everything,”  
in Penelope Rosemont, ed.,  
*Surrealist Women*, 1998

What *is* surrealism? The movement continues to elude all attempts to define it, but its basic aim has been constant from 1924 on: to assist the process by which the imaginary becomes real—or, as Franklin Rosemont puts it, “to realize poetry in everyday life” (Sakolsky, p. 27). In other words, surrealists seek to create a truly free society in which the age-old contradictions between dream and action, reason and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity, have been resolved. Both collectively and individually, surrealists have sought nothing less than a world turned upside down where life can be a wondrous festival fueled by the liberation of the passions, inspired laziness, and an absolute divergence from the tired and oppressive game of social injustice and self-degradation.

As with anarchy, surrealism begins with a questioning attitude toward reality. What if an ordinary bus ride were to become an open-ended adventure in living instead of a dreary trek to work and back? Just such an incident, culled from the archives of the daily Chicago press, was glowingly recounted by Rosemont in the third issue of *Arsenal*, the occasional journal of the Chicago Surrealist Group. As the news story was reported, a Chicago bus driver on Halsted Street, one of the longest in the city, once announced to his passengers that he could no longer endure the monotony of his job and was about to drive the bus that they were on to Florida. Any of the nine or so passengers who wished to accompany him were welcome to stay on board. Two passengers immediately exited, then another, but the rest evidently decided to go to Florida, or at least to see what would happen next. Several hours later, in southern Indiana, the bus was pulled over by State



Police, and the driver arrested and returned to Chicago. Rosemont noted, Notwithstanding its disappointing conclusion, this story has remained for me an unending source of reverie and inspiration. Here were seven people casting aside all the fetters of everyday routine, pursuing every risk for the pleasure of realizing, however fleetingly, something of the splendor hinted at by fairy tales and heroic adventures. Is not all that we have in the way of hope founded on the premise that some day, and perhaps not such a distant day, thousands and even millions will come to approach life with this same ardor for discovery, this readiness to abandon everything but the consequences of desire? Some day there will be no State Police, or any other police, to obstruct the free play of the waking dreamers! Some day the Halsted Street bus will reach Florida and will set out from there to new destinations! From Halsted Street to Easter Island to the Garden of Eden! (p. 27)

From a surrealist point of view, even if never fully achieved in practice, such an “impossible dream” is prized for its uninhibited nature, unbounded by the consciousness-dulling chains forged by the reality police. It proudly situates itself at the crossroads of desire and action, paying no attention to the stoplights of the status quo. Contrary to the way in which it is typically portrayed, surrealism then is not simply about style, but substance—the substance of our very lives. Yet in spite of its revulsion at the constricted ways in which we are expected to conduct ourselves, surrealist thinking is characteristically chock full of enthusiasm and expectation. First despairing of reality, then despairing of that despair, surrealists both seek and provoke glimpses of the Marvelous that can be revealed all around us on those occasions when poetry imposes itself upon the real. As Rosemont put it in *Arsenal 1*, “Instead of realistically escaping life, surrealists aim at seizing life through liberating imagination and desire” (p. 28). And though the busload of dreamers was *leaving* Illinois, Chicago has been an eminently suitable site for their long-term campaign to narrow the gap between poetry and reality.

For many, Chicago’s most notable and enduring place in the history of surrealism is linked to the World Surrealist Exhibition—“Marvelous Freedom/Vigilance of Desire”—which opened on May Day of 1976 at the once and future realm of the Gallery Black Swan at 500 North LaSalle. The “Marvelous Freedom” exhibition included in its magic circle “Eleven Domains of Surrealist Vigilance” dedicated to Bugs Bunny, Robin Hood, bluesman Peetie Wheatstraw, Harpo Marx, Alice in Wonderland, Wobbly sage T-Bone Slim, Alfred Jarry’s favorite pataphysician Dr. Faustroll, the Marquis de Sade’s “new woman” Juliette, Melmoth the Wanderer (phantasmic pro-

tagonist of Charles Robert Maturin's 1820 gothic horror tale), the Duchess of Towers (dedicated to the fictional Peter Ibbetson, who was locked in an insane asylum for the "crime of all time," dreaming true), and Fantomas (absolute enemy of law and order and kindred spirit to Lautréamont's *Mal-doror*). Outside the domains proper, but within reach of them all, were such delights as Gerome Kamrowski's huge assemblage-with-movable-parts, the "Menagerie of Revolt, Aquarium of Love," and Debra Taub's chthonic "Corner of Masks." All told, the Exhibition aimed at a dialectical mix of old and newly created mythologies as a provocative incitement to dream and to act. This was no art-market recuperation of surrealism as a cultural artifact, but the voice of surrealism itself asking, "Who are you?" and, more urgently, "Who will you be?"

By a quirk of history, the site of the Gallery Black Swan has now become the Michael Jordan Restaurant. This is all the more curious in view of Bugs Bunny's direct connection with both. While this is hardly the place to unravel a problem of such complexity, it is worth pointing out that the surrealists' long association with Bugs has always been *wholly unauthorized*, and therefore, if you think about it, wholly in the spirit of the great rabbit himself.

Franklin—who "elaborated" the Domain of Bugs Bunny at the World Surrealist Exhibition—regards Bugs as a veritable symbol of "all that is revolutionary and scandalous" in the work of Hegel. He adds: "The very appearance on the stage of history of a character such as Bugs Bunny is proof that some day the Fudds will be vanquished—that some day all the carrots in the world will be ours" (p. 80). He may be right. Neither the US Postal Service's "officially stamped" Bugs Bunny image nor GM's new Bugs Bunny minivan, which uses him as a carrot to sell cars, seems able to stifle the iconic rabbit's rebel nature, as is demonstrated by the recent popularity of T-shirts bearing yet another unauthorized image of Bugs—this time in dreadlocks. *2000 Reasons Why We Need a Revolution* is the title of a surrealist pamphlet now in preparation. Reason No. 1: To free Bugs Bunny once and for all from the tyranny of AOL-Time Warner!

Beyond the visual art domains, the dazzling array of sounds offered as part of the 1976 "Marvelous Freedom" exhibition highlights yet another dimension of Chicago surrealism: the group's passionate love for Great Black Music. The World Surrealist Exhibition Blues Show featured sets by such blues luminaries as the West Side's Eddie Shaw—backed up by the late Howlin' Wolf's band—and acoustic bluesman Honeyboy Edwards. Louisville-born surrealist poet and blues historian Paul Garon—who used to work at Chicago's old Jazz Record Mart in the days when Big Joe Williams would occasionally drop by—curated this portion of the Exhibition as a labor of love. As legend has it, when the Rosemonts first encountered Garon at Soli-

clarity Bookshop back in 1967, Penelope happened to ask whether he had any Peetie Wheatstraw records; the answer was yes, he had almost all of the nearly eighty 78s Wheatstraw had recorded. The discussion that followed quickly led to Garon's active involvement in the Surrealist Group.

Asked for a summary of the surrealists' perspective on blues today, Garon replies:

To comprehend the surrealist interest in blues requires the comprehension of the poetics of struggle. As surrealists, we see blues as the voice of a people distinctively victimized by the cruelest whims of white culture, but a people who, through poetry, have found a way to pierce the fabric of oppression with the tools of the imagination. The blues performs this function for African Americans even when it may seem to be doing otherwise, for it is a complex layering of struggle, conflict, imagination and poetry. Miscomprehension of the complexity of the blues has led to the proliferation of blues imitators throughout the world. It is in their own self-interest to see blues as having no consequential connection with society and culture, least of all Black society and Black culture, for if it did, how could it be seized for imitation? If it were only a musical form, however—an E chord here, an A chord there—why, anyone can play, can't they? (p. 82)

At the time of the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition, Chicago blues was already being incorporated into mainstream rock, while the city's underground African American music scene, less well-known outside Chicago, was bristling with the energy that radiated from the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) on the South Side. The AACM, which recently celebrated its 35th anniversary, was then at its zenith, and "Great Black Music: Ancient To The Future" became a passionate attraction for many who heard it for the first time in the setting of "Marvelous Freedom."

A touchstone performance by the Sun Song Ensemble featured such AACM stalwarts as consummate reed player/composer Douglas Ewart (now living in Minneapolis), master drummer Hamid Drake, experimental trombonist/composer George Lewis (who later went on to New York, where he did a stint for a time as director of The Kitchen performance space), and free-form vocalists Gloria Brooks and Rrata Christine Jones. Of the latter two, Jones danced in her self-designed costume made of newspapers, while Brooks emitted lyrical screams from the depths of her being. Piano giant Cecil Taylor flew in from New York especially for the Exhibition, and while in town, urged other AACM musicians to attend. His surrealist poem "The Musician" had just been published in *Arsenal* 3 that spring, along with AACM saxophonist/composer Joseph Jarman's mythopoetic piece,

“Odawalla.” Jarman also composed an original composition inspired by the Exhibition.

As Franklin Rosemont recently put it in his memoir-like introduction to *Dancin’ In The Streets*,

Having had the honor and joy of seeing and hearing Thelonius Monk, John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman several times, live, I say without hesitation that our most extravagant revolutionary dreams were summed up, renewed and expanded in the untrammelled loveliness of this music in which human nature is no longer at odds with Nature writ large. As early as the 1950s, some of us recognized the new jazz as the auditory equivalent of surrealism in painting. (p. 46)

For the Chicago Surrealist Group, the whole exhilarating African American musical tradition from blues to rap and bop to free jazz has long provided “marvelous verifications, reinforcements and extensions of their own revolutionary project—and, indeed, new *reasons for living*.”

Note: This essay is excerpted and reworked from my introduction to *Surrealist Subversions*. All quoted material not sourced is based on personal accounts provided by members of the Chicago Surrealist Group. Synchronistically, in the surrealist tarot deck instead of the four traditional suits, a newly created one was the Black Star, symbolizing the dream. Others were the Flame for love, the Bloody Wheel for revolution, and the Key for knowledge.

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—Laura Corsiglia

# Surrealist Desire, Anarchy & the Poetry of Revolt

“It is impossible to understand how millions and millions of people all obey a sickly collection of gentlemen that call themselves ‘Government!’ The word, I expect, frightens people. It is a form of planetary hypnosis, and very unhealthy.”

“It has been going on for years,” I said. “And it only occurred to relatively few to disobey and make what they call revolutions. If they won their revolutions, which they occasionally did, they made more governments, sometimes more cruel and stupid than the last.”

“I am sure it would be very pleasant and healthy for human beings to have no authority whatever. They would have to think for themselves, instead of always being told what to do and think by advertisements, cinemas, policemen and parliaments.”

—Leonora Carrington,  
*The Hearing Trumpet*, 1974

## The Dream of Anarchy & the Anarchy of Dreams

The ongoing surrealist project is, at its core, an uprising against authoritarianism and alienation. It is an insurrection whose goal is the poetic integration of dream and action, subjectivity and objectivity, desire and actuality, coincidence and calculation, passion and reason, impulse and reflection, humor and rage. In all these aspects, surrealism’s desire for the most expansive liberation of the mind is deeply intertwined with its desire for radical social revolution. In histories of anarchism, there is much discussion about “propaganda of word” and “propaganda of deed,” but surrealists alchemically melt these two positions together in order to become “propagandists of desire.” Surrealism’s ultimate aim is the dissolution, synthesis, and supercession of the despotic binary contradictions that are used to suppress the most dazzling possibilities of thought and life. In this regard, surrealism’s refusal of the fetters of reality strikes a sympathetic chord with anarchism’s “impossible” demands in its relentless efforts to derail the capitalist/state juggernaut.

What then are the elective affinities between surrealism and anarchy? One response to such a question is to undertake a search for the histori-

cal, philosophical, and passional attractions between the two within the dancing flames of desire that leap wildly from the crucible of revolt. This is a quest for the ties that *un*bind, converging threads encountering one another in ever changing combinations to boldly fashion a marvelous collage of freedom against the grain of the prefabricated patterns of snivelization.

For poet André Breton, one of the principal founders of the surrealist movement and its most pivotal figure, anarchism was a constantly luminous presence his life. During his 1944 sojourn in Canada, towards the end of his North American exile from France during the second world war, he wrote the book *Arcanum 17*, which is a remarkable meditation on the shades of meaning around the concepts of resistance, rebellion, revolution, liberty, and liberation. Overall, it is widely recognized as an uncompromising and impassioned defense of freedom. In those pages, Breton recalls a very revealing childhood experience:

I shall never forget the exaltation and pride which overcame me, when as a child I was taken for one of the first times into a cemetery, at the discovery—among so many depressing or ridiculous funeral monuments—of a slab of granite engraved in red capitals with the superb motto, “Neither God Nor Master!” Poetry and art will always retain a preference for all which transfigures humanity in this desperate, indomitable demand. (*Arcanum*, pp. 40-41 and Rosemont, *What is Surrealism?*, p. 249)

Here then is the portrait of the young Breton already envisioning a cognitive map of the road to freedom in this blazing anarchist epitaph. The exquisite power of this memory stands as one proof that his embrace of anarchism cannot merely be written off as a passing fancy of old age.

*Arcanum 17* was written at a time when Breton was able to use the isolation of the Gaspé Coast and Québec’s Bonaventure Island to reflect on the origins of his politics. The book opens with visions of “waving black flags” in the very first paragraph. That the black flag of anarchy had always been to Breton an especially compelling beacon in the night is clear from his description of an adolescent experience with both the red and black banners that would point the way on his adult path as a surrealist revolutionary. In recalling this formative experience from 1913, years before the Soviet Revolution, Breton confides that the image of revolutionary communists and anarchists marching together against the State was one that hauntingly motivated him for the rest of his life:

I will always see the red flag, free of marks or symbols, through



the eyes I had when I was seventeen years old, when during a workers' demonstration as the last war drew near, I saw it unfurled by the thousands under the low sky of Pre-Saint-Gervais. I will continue to tremble even more at the memory of the moment when that blazing sea—in a few very limited areas—was pierced by black flags taking wing. I was not yet very aware politically and I really have to admit that I'm still perplexed when I try to gauge how it changed me. I know that my heart did beat, will continue to beat, with the very rhythm of that day.

(*Arcanum*, pp. 38-39)

And we can imagine just such flags waving during what Breton describes as the “magnificent days of riot” which are alluded to towards the end of his 1928 novel, *Nadja*, in relation to the Parisian protests against the persecution of anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti by the US government (p. 153).

In many ways, *Arcanum 17*—with its account of Breton's youthful experiences with radical politics—speaks volumes about the political consciousness which shaped his lifetime desire to build links between the surrealist project and both socialism and anarchism. While, he might, in his own pragmatic moments, ally himself with the Trotskyist opposition to Stalinism, his heart was originally won by anarchy. Returning once again to the cemetery story from his childhood, Breton concludes, “The fact is that above art, above poetry, like it or not, a flag alternately red and black is waving” (*Arcanum*, p. 41). That the surrealist movement's embrace of anarchy was not merely a “youthful indiscretion” was clearly evidenced during the summer of 1947, in a manifesto from the Surrealist Group in Paris, entitled “Rupture Inaugurale,” which proclaimed that “the moral scruples of surrealism would probably find more sympathy in anarchism than elsewhere” (Richardson/Fijalkowski, p. 46). And, in a 1952 essay entitled, “To The Lighthouse,” that originally appeared in the regular surrealist column of the weekly anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire*, Breton reiterated the depths of surrealism's early debt to anarchy by saying, “It was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism recognized itself” (Blechman, p. 160).

Surrealism's postwar relationship to anarchism was made up of more than such reminiscences. Amidst the swamp of French leftist politics during this time, Breton, Benjamin Péret, and other members of the Paris Surrealist Group attempted a collaboration with the French Anarchist

Federation in 1952. Historically, the Paris surrealists have always shown an interest in working with leftist groups with whom they shared an affinity, whether communists or anarchists, as long as their own autonomy in the realm of the poetic was respected. However, as Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski explain in *Surrealism Against The Current*, such groups have found this demand for autonomy difficult to respect, derisively labeling it as a bourgeois deviation or as mere adventurism. Not surprisingly then, the French Surrealist Group's collaborative relationship with the Anarchist Federation lasted only a little over a year. However, when the surrealists effectively ended this particular association with organized anarchism in France, they did so in anarchist terms, and they did not disavow their relationship with anarchy per se.

The Surrealist Group members who signed the "Binary Star" letter to the French Anarchist Federation written shortly before the split occurred, explained their disillusionment as follows:

We have always considered both the Anarchist Federation and Surrealism as revolutionary movements and not just as individual poles of revolt. But we affirm that the revolutionary must always be a rebel under pain of becoming a bureaucrat. This is why placing the accent on total revolt bears witness to a concern to maintain a living fire within us which safeguards us from any submission to an ideal which, as magnificent as it may be, would be certain, without revolt, sooner or later to turn itself into a dogma. One can say of surrealism that its province lies in the realm of perceptions rather than the social realm, but without prejudice to the fact that it stakes its place within the social struggle, otherwise why would we pursue a collaboration with you, comrades? In the same way, if anarchism is a whole, it is undoubtedly on the socioeconomic level that its intervention is primarily placed. Here again the two movements are complimentary.

(Richardson/Fjalkowski, pp. 124-125)

It is in its libertarian dimension that Breton saw the goals of anarchism as complimentary to those of surrealism. So it was that fellow surrealist Robert Desnos, at seventeen, was involved with a band of anarchists that included former Bonnot gang members, whose strategy of "illegalism" had early on attracted the interest of Breton as well. In his younger years, Louis Aragon often wrote for *Le Libertaire*. Other surrealists had an even longer and more intense relationship with anarchism—Léo Malet, for

instance, was associated with the anarchist collectives in France that gathered around the *Insurgé*, *L'En-dehors*, *Journal de l'homme aux sandales*, and *Revue anarchiste* publications. The history of surrealist/anarchist collaboration is a lengthy one, and some individual surrealists had an even tighter and more formal relationship with libertarian thought and activities than the group as a whole. In what follows, we trace some of the key historical connections between surrealism and anarchy.

### **Not-So-Strange Bedfellows**

Mention of surrealism in anarchist circles today almost invariably leads to a critique of André Breton for having been a member of the authoritarian French Communist Party (PCF). In fact, at different points in history, a number of important surrealists have harnessed their star to the authoritarian leftist plough in the hope of planting the seeds of revolutionary change. Although their Communist Party history is well known, the fact that this relationship was always doomed by the surrealist love of anarchy has been largely forgotten, too hastily shoved down the memory hole by essentialist thinkers of all political stripes. What few take the time to investigate, however, is just how brief and ultimately frustrating this tortuous relationship with the PCF actually turned out to be—Breton was indeed a PCF member for a little less than a year in 1927 and remained in the orbit of the Communist Party's Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists until 1933 when he was expelled for refusing to follow the Stalinist line. By the time of the first Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, surrealism had been fully repudiated by the party in favor of its Stalinist antithesis, "socialist realism."

In order to gauge surrealism's interest in Communism (and, more generally, its uneasy association with the organized left), it is important to understand that it was surrealism's outspoken passion for anti-capitalist revolt that is responsible for much of the confusion. Breton moved cautiously towards the communism of the PCF only after his early pre-leftist fascination with the romantic anarchist bank robbers of the Bonnot Gang and his later attraction to the "anarchic nature" of Dada as a young man. Then, the latter was in turn rejected by him for what he considered to be its lack of a revolutionary social goal beyond the individualistic variety of negation which was its cornerstone (Breton, *Lost Steps*, p. 122).

But, we might ask, why then link up with the PCF and not the anarchists? One must remember that at this historical juncture, all too many anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in France were tainted for having

patriotically supported the troops and the war between 1914 and 1918. Moreover, as we shall see, after its problematic relationship with the Stalinist PCF had ended, surrealism still got bogged down in the quagmire of French leftism, through its alliance with the Trotskyist opposition and even in its postwar attempt at collaborating with the Anarchist Federation.

In 1952, looking back on his life with the perspective of hindsight, Breton questioned the logic of his earlier acceptance of a Soviet Marxist-Leninist state, attributing it to the illusionary idea of “efficiency.” In his own words in an article originally published in the anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire*, he recalled,

What we took to be the “triumph” of the Russian Revolution and the advent of a “workers’ state” led to a great change in our perspective. The only dark spot in the picture—a spot which was to become an indelible stain—consisted of the crushing of the Kronstadt Rebellion on March 18, 1921.

(Blechman, pp. 160-161)

Since the leader of the Red Army that ruthlessly put down the revolt of the Kronstadt rebels, many of whom were anarchists, was Leon Trotsky, Breton here recognized that the magnitude of his earlier mistake in supporting the PCF was not dispelled by his subsequent support for Trotskyism. While his later Trotskyist affiliation is certainly understandable in its anti-Stalinist dimensions, it remains at face value extremely problematic from an anarchist perspective.

Interestingly, Breton goes on in this article to explain his ties with Trotskyism in the Thirties as being related to his anarchist sympathies. He notes, “At that time, the surrealists were convinced that a social revolution which would spread to every country could not fail to promote a libertarian world (some say surrealist world, but it is the same thing)” (Blechman, p. 161). Here, one must remember that Trotsky’s doctrine of “permanent revolution” represented to many of his supporters an internationalist alternative to the rigid Soviet-centered Stalinism espoused by the Communist Party. Even France’s Union Anarchiste (U.A.) had organized an anti-Stalinist/anti-fascist revolutionary front, which included Trotskyists, in support of the Spanish Revolution. Yet, Breton’s assumption that Trotskyism embodied a “libertarian” hope in the face of Stalinist dictatorship is worth explaining further precisely because it seems so odd to us now in an anarchist context.

In order to understand the anarchist implications of Breton’s embrace

of Trotskyism, let us examine the Mexican Manifesto of 1938. During his 1938 Mexican visit, Breton collaborated with the exiled Trotsky on a manifesto entitled, “For An Independent Revolutionary Art” (though the document officially gives muralist Diego Rivera co-author status because Trotsky was forbidden to engage in political activity of any sort by the Mexican government during his stay there). While the manifesto made no direct reference to or apologies for Kronstadt, it attacked Stalin’s “socialist realism” policy *in the name of anarchism*. Positing its argument in libertarian socialist terms, it states:

If for the better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a socialist regime with centralized control, to develop intellectual creation, an *anarchist* [italics mine] regime of individual liberty, should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above. (Rosemont, *What is Surrealism?*, p. 185)

As Breton saw the dynamics involved in formulating what he called the Mexican Manifesto,

I reached an agreement with him [Trotsky] about the conditions that, from a revolutionary standpoint, should be established for art and poetry so that they might participate in the struggle for liberation, while remaining completely free to follow their own paths. (*Conversations*, p. 150)

In a recollection that is as revealing of Trotsky’s economic determinism and Eurocentrism, as it is of his lack of understanding of art, Breton says of him,

It’s not the least striking aspect of the man’s life that he won the sympathy of artists, whereas his own understanding of artistic problems was average at best. He was visibly pained when one of us paused to handle a piece of pre-Columbian pottery. I can still see the reproachful look he gave Rivera when the latter maintained (which was hardly extravagant) that drawing had been in decline since the cave period. (*Conversations*, pp. 148)

Breton, while he might have been politically naïve about Trotsky in certain ways, was not naïve about the latter’s inability to grasp surrealism’s intrinsic connection to primal artistic expression. In fact, Trotsky had rather conservative and traditional tastes in the arts and culture and regarded

surrealism as a curious oddity that he could not quite understand.

The manifesto concluded with an appeal for an anti-Stalinist popular front for artists that would be composed of both Marxists and anarchists and would be called the *Federation internationale de l'art révolutionnaire indépendant* (FIARI). Rather than seeing Trotsky's new interest in anarchism as opportunistic, Breton seemingly took him at his word. On his return to Paris, he organized the French branch of FIARI which went on to publish its own short-lived review, *Clé*, which was not only Trotskyist, but to some extent exhibited anarchist tendencies that went beyond the Breton-Trotsky manifesto. In an article entitled, "*Kropotkine: L'Entrée aide*," from its February 1939 issue, author Michel Carrouges states,

Kropotkin's idea that the state is always incompatible with liberty and must be destroyed is most relevant today. The disasters of the first two Internationals and the perfection of the capitalist military machine make it imperative that radicals thoroughly reexamine the problems of the Revolution in the light of Kropotkin's analysis. (Lewis, p. 158)

Breton's alliance with Trotskyism, then, was not explainable purely on the basis of his anti-Stalinist revulsion, but in relation to his hope, which he later realized was mistaken in hindsight, that the revolutionary ferment unleashed by a world communist uprising could potentially lead to a global "libertarian" flowering beyond what the world had ever known, overthrowing not only capitalism and Stalinism, but setting the stage for a libertarian socialism more conducive to the surrealist vision. Here, we must note that in the European leftist context, the term "libertarian" as used by Breton is short for "libertarian socialism" which is often understood to be synonymous with "anarchism." In Breton's definition of it, "It is socialism not conceived as the simple resolution of an economic or political problem, but as the expression of the exploited masses in their desire to create a society without classes, without a state, where all human values can be realized" (Blechman, p. 161). So it was that surrealists André Masson and Benjamin Péret would gravitate to the anarchist side during the Spanish Revolution, rather than fight the fascists as part of Stalin's international brigades.

### **Durruti's Egg Will Bloom**

As Masson—a badly wounded veteran of World War I who spent much of his time in Catalonia—later was to recollect, "When I first saw

the Italian airplanes flying overhead, bound for the new front of Aragon, I did not hesitate for a moment. I signed up at an anarchist union” (Durzoi, p. 325). Other surrealists—such as Mary Low, Juan Bréa, and E.F. Granell—were connected with the Trotskyist-affiliated Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). There were also provisional relations between some surrealists and the Federation of Iberian Anarchists. For years after the Spanish Civil War and well in the 1950s, surrealists like Péret and Breton rallied for human rights protections for anarchist and syndicalist civil war veterans in the jails of Franco and the refugee internment camps of the French government.

For his part, Péret—though originally enlisted with POUM—soon joined the anarchist Nestor Makhno Battalion of the Durruti Column. In an August 1936 letter to Breton upon first arriving in Spain, Péret—widely known for his militant anti-clericalism—waxes ecstatic about the liberating atmosphere he has entered:

If you could see Barcelona as it is now—adorned with barricades, decorated with burnt-out churches, only their outside walls standing—you would be, like me, exultant. Indeed, as soon as you cross the border, it starts. As you arrive in this village, there is the sound of thunder. It’s from a church that the workers, not satisfied with setting fire to it, are dismantling with a rage and joy which is wonderful to see. All over Catalonia, you can see churches which have been set on fire, or whose bells have been taken—it was a magical trip. In Barcelona, no more police. (*Death*, pp. 182-3)

In a March 1937 letter to Breton, he explained his decision to leave the POUM and join the anarchist Amigos de Durruti, as did his lover, the surrealist painter, Remedios Varo:

Any collaboration with the POUM is impossible. They are quite willing to accept people to their right, but not to their left. Otherwise nothing to be done because of the ultra-fast bureaucratization of all the organizations and the scandalous civil servant mentality which is developing. Moreover, as a result of Stalin’s pressures, the revolution is steadily going downhill and if this isn’t halted it will lead directly to violent counter-revolution. Under these circumstances I have decided to sign up with an anarchist militia. (*Death*, pp. 188-9)

On the Aragón Front, he penned the piece “Durruti’s Egg Will Bloom,” in which he further explains his attraction to what he saw as the most



radical form of Spanish anarchism:

I have always seen Durruti as the most revolutionary of the anarchist leaders, the one whose attitude was most violently opposed to the capitulations of the anarchists who entered the government and his assassination has moved me profoundly. (*Death*, p. 190)

When back in Paris in 1951, because of his continued anarchist sympathies in conjunction with the surrealists' October 1951 through January 1953 collaboration with the anarchist weekly, *Le Libertaire*, Péret contributed a six part series to that publication entitled, "Révolution et les syndicats." In it, he critiqued the reactionary state capitalist reformism of the Stalinist-dominated French trade union movement and contrasted it with the revolutionary nature of the workers' councils, an approach more in keeping with the anarcho-syndicalist principles of such other surrealists as Jehan and Marie-Louise Mayoux (*Death*, p. 29). Péret's groundbreaking surrealist research on the workers' councils—and his more general interest in council communism—was later to prove influential on the Socialism or Barbarism group, and through them, on the Situationist International in France.

Moreover, his councilist series from *Le Libertaire* was compiled in pamphlet form and distributed widely, not only during the May-June occupations and wildcat strikes in Paris in 1968, but worldwide amongst the Dutch Provos and the Italian Autonomists, and, as the Seventies dawned, it was translated and republished within the pages of *Radical America* in the US (La Coss, 2003, unpublished). In one installment from September 4, 1953, Péret says, in true autonomist fashion, the workers council was prized for its ability "to burst forth *spontaneously* (*italics mine*) in moments of acute social crisis" (p. 23). The revolutionary potential for the self-managing workers council was both insurrectionary and prefigurative in an organizational sense. Furthermore, Péret couched the councilist model in surrealist language by saying that it "favored a maximum of *creative* (*italics mine*) initiative of the working class, which is thus called upon to take its destiny in its own hands and to directly lead its own struggles" (p. 23).

By the time Péret wrote on the councils in the early 50s, the Soviet betrayal of the Spanish Revolution had already happened, and the idea of the "workers' state" was a cruel joke. It was abundantly clear that what Breton had referred to as the "indelible stain" of the Red Army's crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion was spreading rapidly. No longer could

Kronstadt—or the suppression of anarchist Nestor Makhno’s forces in the Ukraine—merely be dismissed as a temporary aberration in Soviet history. The justification that these events were a last resort in the embattled post-revolutionary civil war period, a necessary detour on the road to Marx’s “withering away of the state,” had long ago worn thin. Rather than being merely a defense of the revolution against the dangers of counter-insurgency, they clearly represented a turning point in the direction of authoritarian state socialism. Indeed, the original Kronstadt “stain” was a reminder of both Trotsky’s complicity in the creation of the authoritarian Soviet state and a harbinger of his own purge and eventual demise at the hands of Stalinist assassins in Mexico.

When, toward the end of his life, Breton reassessed the history of his (and surrealism’s) involvement with the PCF, he framed his actions in terms of a mistaken idealism:

In a horrible mockery, the libertarian world of our dreams was replaced by a world in which the most servile obedience is obligatory, in which the most elementary rights are denied to people, and in which all social life revolves around the cop and the executioner. As in all cases in which a human ideal has reached this depth of corruption, the only remedy is to reimmerge oneself in the great current of feeling in which it was born, to *return to the principles* which allowed it to take form. It is as this moment is coming to its very end that we will encounter anarchism *and it alone* [italics mine]. It is something that is more necessary than ever.

(Blechman, p. 161)

Here, Breton was divorcing himself from both the straitjacket of PCF orthodoxy and a failed Trotskyism which could never deliver on its libertarian promises and calling unequivocally for a return to the anarchist principles that had originally animated and illuminated the surrealist adventure.

Thinking of the Communist Party’s program for social change as “strictly minimal” (*Break of Day*, p. 23), Breton desired a much deeper social upheaval. As Mark Polizotti notes in his preface to Breton’s *Break of Day* about the unlikely relationship between surrealism and the PCF,

That a body of politically-oriented, relatively mainstream functionaries should look askance upon overtures from some obscure poets with a marked anarchistic bent... should come as no surprise to anybody. [Yet,] for Breton, no economic or political revo-

lution could successfully be staged if one did not first revise man's psychological and spiritual orientations—did not in other words, pull him away from the deadening confines of the wage-system mentality and the assembly-line artworks that mirrored and supported it—and he failed to understand how the Communists could so lightly dismiss Surrealism's contribution in that regard.

(*Break of Day*, pp. XI-XII)

As Breton himself tellingly recalls, “The French Communist Party has constantly and openly denigrated our attitude [and] has accused us of vacillating between Marxism and anarchy” (*Break of Day*, p. 34).

Of course, some might still question whether Breton's renewed interest in anarchy at the twilight of his years was really just a way of assuaging his uneasiness about his past associations with the authoritarian left? Breton did, for a time, repeatedly attempt to place surrealism in the “service of the revolution” without subordinating it to party fiat. However, the PCF refused to grant surrealism that autonomy. In his 1926 pamphlet, “The Revolution and The Intellectuals: What Can The Surrealists Do?,” Pierre Naville, a former editor of *La Révolution surréaliste*, had urged the French group to choose between what he considered to be surrealism's “negative anarchistic attitude” (Lewis, p. 56) and the revolutionary path of party discipline. As we have seen, though Breton did briefly join the PCF in 1927, in the end, he chose to return to the anarchist roots of surrealism. Unlike the rigidities of a Party line, the fact that those who identify with surrealism often consider themselves surrealists first and anarchists second, is a question of emphasis, rather than an either-or choice of one or the other. It is an approach which seeks to bring together what has been unnecessarily split asunder by those who would only make half a revolution. A similar desire to create a dynamic balance between surrealism and anarchy was later involved in shaping the identity of the Surrealist Movement in the United States.

## Passing The Torch

While North American surrealists have existed—and continue to exist—outside of Chicago and beyond the Surrealist Movement in the United States—from New York to San Francisco, up to Vancouver and down to New Orleans—it is the Chicago Surrealist Group which has been the fulcrum of the surrealist revolutionary project on this continent. Though the radical genealogy of the Chicago Surrealist Group and

the Surrealist Movement ranges far and wide, it has always been, at its most visceral, the Wild Child of Mother Anarchy. As Franklin Rosemont put it as recently as 2005, “the founding members of the Chicago Surrealist Group were anarchists one and all” (*Dancing*, p. 8). Back in 1983, in order to make the connection of US surrealism to anarchism crystal clear, Rosemont quoted a 1929 statement by Walter Benjamin as follows, “Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The surrealists have one” (Sakolsky, p. 126). When US surrealism’s two principal founders Franklin and Penelope Rosemont had first visited Europe, they were welcomed into the Surrealist Movement in 1966 by Breton himself, shortly before his death.

At that very moment, anarchy was afoot. When the Rosemonts met Breton at the Parisian café Promenade de Vénus, according to Franklin’s account, he very much liked the button Penelope wore, which proudly declared, “I am an Enemy of the State.” (“Ah, anarchiste!” he said, obviously pleased). Such an enthusiastic greeting made it clear that though Breton had shed his connections to the Anarchist Federation years before, he still retained anarchist sympathies.

The Rosemonts found surrealism to still be very much alive in Paris, and Breton was eager to know their estimate of the International Surrealist Exhibition, *L’Ecart Absolu* (Absolute Divergence) at the Galerie l’Oeil. (The theme was inspired by nineteenth-century visionary Charles Fourier’s principle: to diverge from the known is the surest way of making fresh discoveries.). The author of the Surrealist Manifestoes also asked his young American friends about the prospects for surrealist activity in the United States—a frequent topic of group discussion at the café. At the group’s request, Franklin and Penelope wrote an article on the “Situation of Surrealism in the United States,” which appeared in French translation in the Paris group’s journal *L’Archibras*.

The Rosemonts returned from Paris to Chicago in mid-May 1966 as active participants in the international surrealist movement, determined to organize a Surrealist Group in the United States. During World War II, Breton and a number of other European surrealist refugees from Nazism had lived in New York, where they had carried on a certain amount of collective activity with the help of some US writers and artists, but their meetings and publications were mostly in French. Prior to the formation of the Surrealist Group in Chicago in 1966, the “Surrealist International” had no organized affiliate in that country. In their May Day ’67 collective letter to the Rosemonts, the Surrealist Group in Paris declared

their “total agreement” with, and “wholehearted affection” for, their Chicago surrealist friends. While the founders of the Chicago group and their compatriots throughout the United States have held many diverse views, they have all agreed that surrealism’s revolutionary project, as set forth in Breton’s *Manifestoes*, is far from being completed—and in fact, has only begun—and that surrealist revolution is now more urgent than ever. As Franklin summed it up in the closing words of US Surrealism’s first manifesto, published in *Arsenal 1* (1970): “What remains for surrealism to do far exceeds what surrealism has done.”

## A Situationist Interlude

In this evaluation of surrealism’s future potential the Rosemonts and their friends indicated a basic disagreement with the Situationists, then a fledgling French revolutionary group that claimed to have superseded surrealism. As Franklin Rosemont explains the strained relationship between surrealism and situationism,

In the naïve and belligerent belief that they had already superseded the arts in theory, and would soon (come the Revolution) supersede them in practice, situationists let it be known that they were not interested in contemporary painting, poetry, or music. Indeed they fostered the notion that such activities are anti-revolutionary, passé, part of the capitalist spectacle. Inasmuch as surrealists have always regarded the liberation of the imagination—and of all creativity—as the most essential part of the social revolution, a considerable amount of situationist propaganda was directed against them. (Rosemont/Radcliffe, p. 62)

While in Paris, Franklin and Penelope had a long afternoon of discussions with situationist founder Guy Debord, whom they both liked. Notwithstanding his animosity toward the younger surrealists in France, Debord avowed himself a great admirer of André Breton, and boasted that he had read “every word” of Breton’s published writings. The Rosemonts had no disagreement with Debord’s brilliant critique of the “spectacular” nature of commodity culture, or with his emphasis on the need to “create situations” to overcome the passivity engendered by that spectacle, thereby opening emancipatory possibilities for a revolution of everyday life. The situationists’ denial of surrealism’s viability, however, seemed to them both superficial and misinformed. Franklin calls this part of the situationist program “undialectical, puritanical and authori-

tarian,” and suggests that it reflected a deep-rooted distrust of poetry and art, an attitude by no means uncommon among “specialists in politics.”

However, instead of seeing situationism itself as antagonistic to surrealism, Rosemont continues to see their affinity with one another to this day. As he has put it in retrospect:

It is high time to recognize that The Society of the Spectacle is not only a work in the Hegel/Marx tradition, but also, and more particularly, in the surrealist anti-tradition. The central elements of the situationist project—rejection of the pseudo-world of the spectacle; support for workers self-emancipation; the passion for freedom and true community; revolt against work and affirmation of play, detournement, revolution as festival, “consciousness of desire and desire of consciousness”—were all essentials of surrealism’s project long before the SI existed... Debord’s concern was to build a new world revolutionary movement on foundations that were, in essence, though he himself rarely dared to admit it—surrealist. (Rosemont/Radcliffe, pp. 63-64)

Consequently—and notwithstanding these differences—the Chicago Surrealists promoted situationist ideas, and the Rosemonts returned to the US with hundreds of copies of situationist pamphlets. The Chicago-based *Rebel Worker* published some of the first situationist texts to appear in the United States; the Situationist International’s (SI) tract on the 1965 Watts Rebellion was reprinted as a *Rebel Worker* pamphlet. For several years, Chicago’s Solidarity Bookshop was the principal US outlet for situationist publications. The relationship, however, was not reciprocal. The eleventh issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste* (October 1967) refers slightlyingly, and only in passing, to the Chicagoans’ “anarcho-surrealism.”

This “anarcho-surrealism” comment was very revealing of the situationists’ disdain for anarchism—just as their frustration at their generational peers in Chicago reveals their own complex “oedipal” relationship with surrealism which Len Bracken has referred to in non-Freudian terms as stemming from an “anxiety of influence” (Bracken, p. 48) that is rooted in situationist appropriation and development of certain surrealist ideas for “unchaining,” ranging from “detournement” to the “dérive.” The SI’s distaste for what they saw as the naiveté of anarchism is very clearly stated in Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*. Debord claims:

Anarchism remains a merely ideological negation of the State

and of classes. It is the ideology of pure liberty, which equalizes everything and dismisses the very idea of historical evil... The illusion entertained more or less explicitly by genuine anarchism is the permanent imminence of an instantaneously accomplished revolution which will prove the truth of the ideology and the mode of practical organization derived from the ideology.

(Debord, *Society*, #92 and #94)

In contrast to what Penelope Rosemont has called “revolution by chance,” the situationist theorist René Riesel denounced any such approach as “subanarchist spontaneism” promulgated by “mystics of non-organization” (Knabb, *SI Anthology*, p. 277). Such SI language is, of course, very familiar in relation to current critiques being made of anti-authoritarians who question leftist organizational forms. In this sense it seems strange that many twenty-first century anarchists should *uncritically* ally themselves with situationism and, by dint of that association, its dismissal of any affinity with surrealism. However, the situationist critique of surrealism is worthy of our attention here because of its radical nature and what it reveals about the commonalties and differences between these movements, especially as they relate to anarchism.

In reference to Raoul Vaneigem’s book *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*, Don La Coss defends surrealism against its situationist author’s “prosecution,” taking him to task in particular for his superficial reading of the attempted cooptation of surrealism by the world of art and commerce. As La Coss puts it:

Debord’s accusation that surrealism was tamed of its revolutionary designs by its conversion “into ordinary aesthetic commerce” is the central diagnosis that informs Vaneigem’s *Cavalier History*. This is a common Situationist position, as it relates to the ways in which radical cultural politics are defused and rehabilitated by the capitalist apparatus.... Instead of dissent, then, there is only the buying and selling of the spectacle of dissent, totally devoid of political relevance.... The Situationists held that surrealism had been “spectacularized”...; bought out and dead in the water, surrealism was “only the beginning of a revolutionary experiment in culture, an experiment that almost immediately ground to a halt practically and theoretically.” This patently self-promoting edict skips over a continuous surrealist struggle to short-circuit the engines of cooptation



that assailed the movement. Ironically, in their conniving with academia and the culture industry to declare surrealism extinct and to cover up its contributions to radical critical thinking, the surviving Situationists are collaborating with the forces of the spectacle themselves. Rather than support the surrealists' campaign to liberate the dream as a means for halting the draining off of the Marvelous from everyday life, Vaneigem chides them for promoting "the organization of social passivity"... In attacking dreaming as a passive activity, he supports the binary opposition between dream and action so crucial to the hegemony of the capitalist work ethic.

(Sakolsky, pp. 426-7)

Indeed, looking back at Vaneigem's book (written in 1970 and first published in 1977), it seems abundantly clear that the subtext is a desire to discredit surrealism once and for all, so as to open the way for situationism to fill the vacuum.

The divisiveness of this tactic is all the more unfortunate because "desire" and the "imagination" are so relevant to both groups. As Anselm Jappe, one of Debord's biographers, has put it,

It is true that these concepts had played a big part in all attempts to liberate individual lived experience, especially those of Surrealism. The Situationists themselves belong to this tradition, but the great originality—and in a sense too the limitations—of their ideas in this area is their conception of desire as a force that is not *unconscious* and bound to *needs* but instead *conscious* and chosen by the individual. (Jappe, 1999, p. 129)

Perhaps the replacement of the revolutionary optimism that characterized Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) with the deep pessimism of his later *Comments On The Society Of The Spectacle* (1988) can be partly explained by situationism's jettisoning of the unconscious. In relation to the possibilities for opposing the spectacle, the SI's subsequent need is to envision revolutionary change as only coming about through a desire based upon a "conscious" opposition to spectacular society or the latter's implosion. In the case of the spectacular social system, as a result of its own inability to strategically manage itself, it spirals out of control into dissolution while attempting to create a "spectacle of terrorism" aimed at making a police state seem to be the lesser of two evils. While this scenario sounds very familiar to "post-911" ears, from a surrealist perspective, as long as we remain exclusively in the realm of the rational, we are stuck

with the political uncertainties of such apocalyptic doomsday prophecies as the only alternative to a purely rational “coming to consciousness.”

Is the answer to the revolutionary conundrum then to be found, at least in part, in a return of the repressed? The situationists were dismissive of what they considered to be surrealism’s overestimation of the revolutionary potential of the unconscious imagination and the surrealist movement’s allegiance to the irrational which, as the SI saw it, prevented surrealism from heeding Rimbaud’s radical injunction to “change life.” To Debord, surrealism’s reactionary trajectory only offered an escapist “flight from reality” (McDonough, p. 67). However, contrary to Debord’s analysis, as Franklin Rosemont understands it, surrealism is not irrational, it is “anti-rational.” Moreover, as he further explained this distinction in a 1970 *Arsenal* essay,

Surrealism strives to liberate the imagination from the structures of repression, to restore our latent poetic faculties, to put language in the service of desire and to enable it to formulate ardent images of implacable subversion. There is no realistic escape from life which offers more than the surrealist seizure of life. (Sakolsky, p. 168)

Moreover, instead of seeing the Paris surrealists initial alliance with the French Communist party—regardless of its ultimate outcome—as based on a desire to *avoid* the very kind of capitalist cooptation that Vaneigem rightly warns against, he chooses to simplistically wield their party affiliation as a brickbat against them. Ignoring the fact that they were standing on the shoulders of those they were criticizing, the situationists chose not to simply learn from surrealist mistakes, but to unnecessarily relegate surrealism to the rubbish heap of history. As early as 1958, Debord had dismissed surrealism as “boring” and “reactionary” (McDonough, p. 68). Seeking to escape what they considered to be a “decrepit” surrealism’s ensnarement in the ideological traps of the Marxist left or its ill-fated collaboration with what they referred to as “the pitiful Anarchist Federation” (Knabb, *SI Anthology*, p. 351), the SI instead embraced the self-management of council communism that, ironically, had previously been put forward by Péret in the name of surrealism in his *Le Libertaire* series from the 50s.

Here the emphasis was on workers’ councils as being the backbone of what Debord adamantly heralded in leftist terms as “an anti-statist dictatorship of the proletariat” (*Society*, 179). Instead of seeking to combat the alienation of capitalism with alienated forms of struggle, the SI unequivocally echoed the cry for generalized self-management that had,

since Péret, most prominently been raised in France by the Socialism or Barbarism group of which Debord himself had been a member in 1960. Seeing the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic form of state capitalism, Socialism or Barbarism had broken with Trotskyism after World War II, but did not ally itself with anarchism. Eschewing both the proselytizing manipulations and self-sacrificing “militantism” of the French authoritarian left and the timidity of the trade union bureaucracies that had together betrayed the revolutionary potential of the Paris occupations of May 1968, the SI championed the non-hierarchical approach of the workers’ councils. In so doing, they were able to avoid any association with what Breton had, in the 50s, referred to as the “indelible stain” resulting from the crushing of the Kronstadt soviet by, in effect, calling for the resurrection of the “soviet” organizational model in the context of a generalized self-management. However, unlike Péret’s approach, the workers’ councils were decidedly not conceptualized in anarchist terms. As situationist chronicler Ken Knabb explains, “Generalized self-management avoids both the hierarchical forms of the traditional left and the more simplistic forms of anarchism” (*Public Secrets*, p. 66).

In contrast, from a contemporary “anarchy beyond leftism” point of view, it is leftism, rather than anarchy, that is the problem. Using this analysis, by refusing anarchism but not leftism, situationism unwittingly found itself in the same troubled waters that surrealism had sailed upon years earlier. In order to avoid floundering in authoritarian seas, the situationists had rejected what they considered to be the proven unreliability of the surrealist boat for a new vessel, the good ship Self-Management. Yet, while the situationists could now set sail without the excess baggage of a PCF captain at the helm or the need to throw in their lot with would-be Trotskyist commissars claiming to be mutineers, their ship still remained at least partially anchored in the still waters of leftist rationality. Consequently, not only their range of movement but of vision was limited. In a phrase that resonates with both anarchist demands for the impossible and surrealist concerns with empowering the creative imagination, self-management as a strategy still had to grapple with the problem of what anti-authoritarian thinker Wolfi Landstreicher has termed, “a realism that cannot dream” (p. 47).

In his 1974 essay, “From Wildcat Strike To Total Self-Management,” Vaneigem’s views resonate more sympathetically with those of surrealism than was the case with his earlier *Cavalier History*. By then a post-situationist writing under the pseudonym of Ratgeb, Vaneigem, like

Péret, argued for an expansive interpretation of council communism that sought to avoid the recuperation of revolutionary self-management into the “self-management of alienation.” As he saw it,

We want the self-management of freedoms, not the self-management of oppression and lies (which amounts to nothing other than oppression and lies in the name of self-management)... The new social organization is nothing other than the organization by all individuals of desires, passions and dreams, creating day by day the historical conditions of their liberation, development and practical fulfillment. (*Collection*, pp. 74/81)

While still following a decidedly leftist trajectory that envisioned the insurrectionary wildcat strike and the factory occupation at the point of production as the primary locus points for a more widespread dissemination of his model of “generalized self-management” assemblies operating in conjunction with “automated workshops” and “mechanized agriculture,” Vaneigem here tried to reclaim the suppressed legacy of Kronstadt by charting a new course between the Scylla of Trotskyism and the Charybdis of actually existing French anarchism.

Going beyond his expansive theories of “generalized self management,” Vaneigem’s emphasis on “radical subjectivity” charted a very different situationist course than that of Debord. In *Revolution of Everyday Life* (originally published in 1967), Vaneigem reclaims the realm of the unconscious, so prized by surrealism, for situationism, acting in opposition to Debord’s rationalist dismissal of the unconscious as an untrustworthy revolutionary tool. For Vaneigem, if the goal of situationism is to supercede art so as to realize a carnivalesque “lived poetry” that doesn’t merely incite but embodies revolution, then spontaneity must be recognized in a strategic sense. As he put it, “Poetry is the organization of creative spontaneity” (*Revolution*, p. 153). In this regard, John Moore has postulated that, for Vaneigem:

The situationist notion of poetry opens the possibility for new forms of affirmative aesthetic intervention and insurgent creativity... Vaneigem denies Debord’s emphasis on rational controls by stressing the inseparability of creativity and spontaneity—a move which opens up once again the links between the unconscious, the creative imagination and radical social transformation. (p. 158)

Given his understanding of these links, Vaneigem was able to recognize the connection between creativity, spontaneity, and the poetry of revolt in ways that make his writings on situationism much more compatible with both surrealist and anarchist ways of thinking than those of Debord. So much so that English anarchist, surrealist, and one-time situationist Charles Radcliffe, editor of the magazine, *Heatwave*, has called the book *Revolution of Everyday Life* “an inspired, apocalyptic and passionate fusion of wisdom, madness and rage” in contrast to Debord’s “elegantly clinical, almost mathematical dissection” (Rosemont/Radcliffe, 2005, p. 376).

While Debord coldly distanced himself from anarchism, Vaneigem, as Charles Radcliffe recollects, was, like the young Breton and Desnos, an aficionado of the Bonnot Gang whose bank robberies were celebrated in the pages of the individualist-oriented *L’Anarchie* magazine. Vaneigem, as Radcliffe remembers him, also had an attraction for the daring of “propaganda-by-the-deed” anarchist bombers like Ravachol (Francois Koenigstein) and Emile Henry (Rosemont/Radcliffe, p. 361). It was this same Henry who the young Breton considered to be “the most magnificent expression of individual revolt” (Polizzotti, 1995, p. 18). In keeping with such sentiments, *La Revolution surrealiste* (number 1, 1920) featured a photomontage of 28 French surrealists surrounding anarchist militant Germaine Berton, who in a 1923 attentat, had shot Maurice Platteau, the editorial secretary of the right wing *L’Action française*, with a revolver. The collage includes the following epitaph taken from Charles Baudelaire: “Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light upon our dreams.” In the same issue, Louis Aragon said of such a woman that she was the “greatest challenge to slavery (he) knew, the finest protest thrown in the face of the world against the hideous lies of happiness.” After her acquittal that same year, she received a basket of roses and carnations, brought by surrealists Simone Breton, Louis Aragon, and Max Morise. Quite naturally, then, Vaneigem’s approach to situationism shared many formative affinities with aspects of both the surrealist and the anarchist project.

In relation to situationism’s critique of anarchism, Ken Knabb offers the following cautionary note to those who would confuse situationism and anarchism rather than merely understand the affinities between them: “The situationists have been seen as anarchists because they criticize Marxists and vice versa, as ‘right-wing’ because they criticize the left, as ‘primitivists’ resisting progress because they attack modern reality and the technocrats” (*Public Secrets*, p. 272). As Knabb implies, such

simplistic characterizations of the SI that fail to differentiate it from anarchism, in spite of repeated situationist denials, are both misleading and inaccurate. Moreover, while their rejection of vanguardism links the workers' councils to the anarchist project, such an anti-elitist approach was not in evidence in relation to the SI's own internal organizational dynamics. The latter involved a self-selected "Conspiracy of Equals" which claimed to represent a third way between anarchism and Leninism. In this regard, it said of itself, "the only thing we organize is the *detonator*; the explosion must be free, escaping permanently our control just as it does from anyone else" (Jappe, pp. 93-94). An interesting approach to be sure, because it allows some room for spontaneity, but, since its "pre-detonation" vanguardism seeks to "manage" insurgency by framing the subsequent action, it brings up the always troubling question of whether one can separate the means from the ends without the former impacting the latter in a way that would be undesirable from an anarchist perspective.

## **Back in the USA**

Getting back to US surrealism, when they were not being derisively labeled "anarcho-surrealists" by the SI, the Chicago Surrealist Group, was sometimes simplistically lumped together with Marxist-Leninists or dismissed as Trotskyist sectarians. In response to such attempts to pigeon-hole them, they have declared their surrealism to be, in their own words,

too anarchist for most Marxists, too Marxist for most anarchists, too much in love with poetry and painting for most politicians, too involved in the revolutionary movement for most writers and artists; too immersed in theoretical inquiry for activists, too unruly for the professorariat; too rigorous in poetic matters for wheeler-dealers in the "Spirituality" racket, too devoted to the Marvelous for those afflicted with instrumentalist rationalism; too Freudian for the positivist/puritanical left, too "wild" for the conservative medical usurpers of psychoanalysis—surrealism continues to flourish in the only way it can: *outside and against* all the dominant paradigms.

(Rosemont, et al, *Forecast*, p. xxxiv)

From this perspective, the point is to make surrealist use of both Marxist and anarchist insights. In attempting to understand the Chicago Surrealist Group, rather than seeing Marxist and anarchist elements as

unrelated, we might gain more by amplifying their linkages and confluences in the context of surrealism.

Having established the complex nature of American surrealism's political reference points, I'd like to, for the remainder of this essay, return to its "elective affinities" with anarchy and its "passional attractions" to various anti-authoritarian currents, and more generally, to the spirit of revolt itself. I am interested then in looking not only for anarchist elements of all kinds in the Chicago Surrealist Group and the Surrealist Movement in the United States, but anarchist implications and traces in relation to both their theoretical statements and group activities. The Surrealist Movement, unlike a mass movement, has never been about attracting a massified membership of followers to an ideology. Instead, it favors stimulating poetic invention, visionary thinking, and subversive activity in the realm of perception which, of course, has implications for both public political action and the way one builds upon the radicalism of the past, imagines the future, and lives one's life in the present. It is precisely the non-dogmatic nature of surrealism that has provided for its constant evolution and renewal in an American political context that has been historically different than that of France.

### **Steeped in Anarchism: Haymarket & the "Chicago Idea"**

Given its characterization of itself as the "far left of the far left," the Chicago Surrealist Group, unlike their French counterparts, had no history of Communist Party affiliation to overcome. Quite naturally then, the situationists' embrace of the self-managing workers' councils finds its analogy in the fiery heritage of Péret and the Chicago surrealists' attraction to the radical unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies). However, the anarchist flavor of the IWW cannot be effectively captured in the anarcho-syndicalist or libertarian socialist terms of leftism. As Franklin Rosemont has put it:

At bottom, what set Wobs apart from the various isms was not reducible to ideology or structure. Fundamentally, anti-authoritarian, open-ended, and focused on revolutionary creativity, the IWW differed not only theoretically and organizationally from other radical and would-be radical groups: Its whole sensibility was different. With the high place it has always accorded to spontaneity, poetry and humor, the IWW was unique in the history of the labor movement, resembling, especially at the local level, free associations of artists, poets, musicians, and other cre-



ative dreamers. Their unwavering emphasis was on workers' self-organization, direct action and point of production democracy. Wobblies knew too much about work to be "workerist." Like the Haymarket anarchists who preceded them but on a much larger scale, the Wobblies embodied not only a social and economic revolution but also a revolution in *culture*. (Joe Hill, pp. 26-32)

The exuberant Wobbly call for an end to "wage slavery" allowed Chicago's emerging surrealists to envision themselves as being connected to an even older radical current: Haymarket. Many of the old Chicago Wobs who they met had known the celebrated anarchist agitator Lucy Parsons (widow of Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons), who had co-founded the IWW in 1905. But it was from Captain Schaack's *Anarchy and Anarchists* (1889) that the *Rebel Worker* group learned that the Haymarket anarchists lived in the same neighborhood as they did. "This chancy coincidence," says Penelope Rosemont, "certainly nourished our dreams, and inspired us to learn more." Tor Faegre's beautiful, elegantly calligraphed Solidarity Bookshop Anarchist/Revolutionary Calendars drew heavily on the engravings from Schaack's book. In 1967, several members of the *Rebel Worker* group co-founded the Louis Lingg Memorial Chapter of SDS—named for the youngest and most militant of the Haymarket anarchists.

However, the Chicago surrealists' interest in the IWW is not rooted in a leftist alliance of convenience between the socioeconomic on one hand and the surrealist on the other. Instead, it emanates from a more organic form of cultural solidarity. Unlike the French Surrealist Group's connection to the Communist Party or the SI's embrace of the trappings of council communism, the Chicagoans acknowledge their subversive affinity with what they see as the vernacular surrealist elements that pervade Wobbly culture. Far more than just an anarcho-syndicalist relic, even today the IWW is considered by Franklin Rosemont "the most surrealist group in US labor history." And although he is no longer a dues-paying member, he continues to describe himself politically as "a thoroughgoing Wobbly."

A large part of his work as a historian stems from his own early experience of Wobbly hobo/hemian culture. His "Short Treatise on Wobbly Cartoons"—appended to the expanded edition of Joyce Kornbluh's *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*—is one of the very few detailed studies of radical labor iconography. He has also edited and introduced *Juice Is Stranger than Friction*, a collection of writings by the greatest of all Wobbly writers, hobo/philosopher/humorist T-Bone Slim (sometimes called "the Lenny

Bruce of the labor movement”); a reprint of the IWW’s 1913 *Mr. Block* comic book, which inspired one of Joe Hill’s most popular songs; a selection of antiwar writings by the World-War-I-era Wobbly theorist Mary E. Marcy; and in 1997, a volume of the “selected ravings” of Slim Brundage, the Wobbly founder and janitor of the dadaesque College of Complexes, aka “the playground for people who think” and “Chicago’s Number One Beatnik Bistro.” Brundage himself was a rare living link between the older radical working class intellectual community of the Northside’s IWW/ Bughouse Square/Dil Pickle Club nexus and their Beat Generation/New Left counter-cultural successors. Both a piece on the College of Complexes and Rosemont’s textual narrative, “Wobblies in the ‘60s: The Rebel Worker Group in Chicago” appeared in comic book form in 2005 as part of a volume entitled *Wobblies: A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, published as part of the IWW’s centennial year celebration.

In his full-length study of Joe Hill, Rosemont discusses for the first time anywhere the Wobbly bard’s contributions to labor cartooning, wilderness radicalism, women’s liberation, and the struggle against white supremacy. Far more than a biography, the book is a fundamental re-examination of the IWW, its rich and many sided culture, and its relation to such currents as romanticism, Futurism, the Chicago Renaissance, the Beat Generation, and surrealism, emphasizing throughout the significance of the Wobblies’ multiple legacies for revolutionary struggle in our own time. In terms of explaining the poetics of revolt inherent in American “vernacular surrealism,” the book does for the Wobblies what fellow Chicago surrealist Paul Garon’s writings have done to illuminate the radical nature of the blues. The historical bridge between the Wobblies and the Surrealist Group was the IWW branch publication calling itself *The Rebel Worker*. Thanks to a 2005 reissue of archival *Rebel Worker* material from the ‘60s, compiled by Rosemont as part of *Dancin’ in the Streets*, one can now easily discover this missing link. The name *Rebel Worker*—which conjures up images not only of the worker as rebel, but of the rebellion against work—was taken from an old Wobbly publication from 1919. It distinguished itself from much of the “New and Used Left” by peppering its radical working class politics with black humor and surrealist poetry.

In *Rebel Worker* #4, anarcho-surrealist Bernard Marszalek, in a book review on the shortcomings of Irving Horowitz’s *The Anarchists*, concludes, where Horowitz touches on anarcho-syndicalism, his discussion is sterile and completely devoid of any exposition of the syndicalist truth slowly but definitely being realized by work-

ers throughout the world, that the boss can reside in the union hall just as surely as he does in the executive john.

(Rosemont/Radcliffe, p. 137)

This is the kind of key insight that distinguishes the Wobblies from the pervasive business unionism which channels the potential for working class insurgency into the carrot and the stick treadmill of capitalist manipulation. Marszalek graced the pages of *The Rebel Worker* with essays whose subjects ranged from Malatesta to critiques of the media and from “The Psychedelic Movement” to such direct action Vietnam era draft resisters as Barry Bondhus, a Minnesota youth who took two buckets of shit into his draft board office and dumped them into six file drawers. Years before Reclaim The Streets, one of Marszalek’s *Rebel Worker* diatribes about the “cops of everyday life,” written in solidarity with Martha and the Vandellas, pointedly asked the very surrealist question, “Have you ever noticed how empty the streets are of dancers during the day?” (Rosemont/Radcliffe, p. 212).

Marszalek, who was the “Chicago representative” of Colin Ward’s *Anarchy* magazine, published by Freedom Press in London, remembered his own father carrying a Wobbly red card in the 20s. And later, like the other younger generation rebel workers, he sought to breathe life into the then moribund union. In the *Dancin’* introduction, Rosemont concludes with revolutionary optimism,

While others patiently published platforms, programs and policy statements, we rushed into print with our wildest dreams and desires. As had happened before and surely will happen again, it was left to a bunch of naïve and irresponsible adolescents, mad at the world but avid for life, to sound a new note—whole riffs of new notes in American radicalism. (pp. 80 and 2).

During the Sixties, these “new notes” were increasingly being heard in kindred-spirit publications like *Resurgence*, *Black Mask*, and in the UK, *Heatwave*.

Like the founders of the IWW, the *Rebel Worker* group—and the Chicago surrealists—identified themselves as direct heirs to the Haymarket anarchist tradition. The very title of the introduction to the Chicago Surrealist Group’s anthology *The Forecast Is Hot!*—“Surrealism: The Chicago Idea”—goes back precisely to those heady days of the 1880s when the city’s anarchists fanned the flames of a burgeoning popular insurrection

that innovatively linked political radicalism to a thoroughgoing oppositional culture. Not even the judicial murder of the Haymarket anarchists in 1887 was able to silence this imaginative “Chicago Idea,” as it was called, for the martyrs’ voices were heard and heeded by such pivotal anarchists as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and countless others. They still reverberate today. Embedded in the cracks of the American dream, Chicago’s revolutionary traditions have persisted to a degree perhaps unknown anywhere else in the country. In their different ways, such characteristically Chicago counter-institutions as the IWW, the anarchist Free Society Group, the old Dil Pickle Club, the early Second City, and the Surrealist Group are also part of that legacy.

Surrealists internationally immediately recognized the Haymarket/surrealist connection. The Paris Surrealist Group’s first collective letter to their Chicago comrades bears the date May 1, 1967, “anniversary of the Chicago workers’ uprising.” Fittingly, in 1986, Haymarket’s centennial, Franklin co-edited with Dave Roediger a large compendium on the 1880s’ events and their impact: *Haymarket Scrapbook*, published by Charles H. Kerr. Its two hundred fifty six profusely illustrated pages contain writings by the Haymarket anarchists, their friends, and later radicals influenced by Haymarket, as well as original contributions by such important historians of anarchy as Paul Avrich, Carolyn Ashbaugh, and Sal Salerno.

Several surrealists contributed to the *Scrapbook*. Penelope Rosemont wrote about the great eccentric communist-anarchist-feminist George Francis Train. Wisconsin-born sculptor Robert Green, one-time IWW organizer, friend of Neal Cassady’s and a co-founder of the Chicago Surrealist Group, contributed a full-page cartoon. Paul Garon, from Louisville, Kentucky—another central figure of the group, which he joined in 1968—collaborated with his wife Beth on a meticulously researched analysis of the notorious Haymarket broadside of May 4, 1886. Longtime Pennsylvanian Joseph Jablonski, active in surrealism since 1970, contributed two articles: one on the Haymarket anarchists’ openly avowed atheism and another on the role of Shakers and Spiritualist mediums in the Haymarket defense and amnesty campaign. One of American surrealism’s best-known poets, Jablonski is also a noted historian of millennialism and utopianism.

Another *Scrapbook* article, on the impact of the Haymarket events in Australia, was written by Australian poet Michael Vandelaar, a participant in Chicago surrealism for several months in 1976, and two years later, one of the founders of the Surrealist Group “down under.” When we recall that the volume’s co-editor Dave Roediger—best-known for his

later groundbreaking research on the origins of working class racism—has himself collaborated extensively on surrealist publications since the mid-1970s, it becomes clear that *Haymarket Scrapbook* is in many ways a surrealist contribution to the illumination of one of the watershed events in anarchist labor history.

In November 1999, the same month as the Battle of Seattle, a remarkable sequel to the Haymarket/surrealism saga arrived on the wings of objective chance. Yet another *Scrapbook* contributor, O.W. Neebe—grandson of Oscar Neebe, one of the Haymarket Eight—held an exhibition (his first) of his own automatistic paintings, explicitly under the banner of surrealism. “I’ve spent most of my life in organized crime,” Neebe says, humorously referring to his decades’ employment as graphic designer in the field of advertising. “I was always working for somebody else, doing what *they* wanted, and when I retired I decided to find out what I had in *me*, and what I could do, in complete freedom, without the boring pretext of having to do it as a job.”

In 1964, when the *Rebel Worker* Group was formed, no self-defined anarchist organization existed in Chicago. The old Free Society Group, whose membership had included the Russians G. P. Maximoff and Boris Yelensky as well as the Spanish-born Maximiliano Olaj, had dispersed a few years earlier. Its archive, however — including pamphlets by Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker, and Augustine Souchy — was stored at the IWW hall and was soon back in circulation at Solidarity Bookshop.

While it lasted, Solidarity was *the* center for anarchist education and agitation in Chicago and the entire Midwest. When the New York Libertarian League folded, its central figures, Sam and Esther Dolgoff—at whose apartment Franklin Rosemont was a frequent house-guest in those years—shipped its remaining stock of books and pamphlets to their young Chicago friends. In the next few months, the declining New York Spanish and Italian-language anarchist groups did likewise. Old-time anarchists such as Skidroad Slim (Guy B. Askew), who lived in a Seattle flophouse and signed off his letters, “Yours for a fighting anarchist IWW” and the peripatetic utopian individualist-mutualist Rusel Jaque declared their hearty support for the *Rebel Worker* and its bookshop. Anarchist groups from all over the world regularly sent bundles of their periodicals to Solidarity. Where else in the US could you pick up *Umanita Nova* from Italy, *Rouge et Noir* and *Le Monde libertaire* from France, or *Tierra y Libertad* from Mexico? As a principal heir to the older pre-60s anarchist movement in the US, Solidarity was also a powerful magnet for anarchis-

tically-inclined youth. The growing number of young rebels who found the bookshop “groovy”—and enjoyed hanging out there—made up what became known as the Anarchist Horde. As informal as the name implies, the Horde never had a real organizational existence, held very few meetings, and collected no dues. It was nonetheless a real *presence* in the broad Chicago left, especially in the antiwar movement where they marched under the IWW’s huge red banner alongside a bevy of black flags.

On the Rosemonts’ first trip overseas (1965-66), they stayed in London for several weeks with Charles Radcliffe and his partner Diana Shelley, both contributors to *Freedom* and *Anarchy*. With the Radcliffes as co-editors, they issued a special British edition of *The Rebel Worker* under the banner: “Freedom: the Only Cause Worth Serving” (Number 5), which the trio distributed widely on May Day at Hyde Park. The upstart mimeographed rag created something of a sensation—a lot of kids seemed to like it, but (or should I say therefore) several old-line Marxist journals denounced it roundly, as they did Radcliffe’s sister publication, *Heatwave*, to which several Chicago surrealists contributed. A year later, Radcliffe joined the Situationist International—but soon left in protest against what he regarded as the SI’s parochialism and bureaucratism. He is, in fact, one of the tiny handful of people who resigned from the SI; almost all the other members were expelled. In recent years, Radcliffe’s collaboration with Franklin Rosemont on the book, *Dancin’ In the Streets* has republished all issues of not only *The Rebel Worker* but *Heatwave* as well, with reflective introductions by each editor. From Radcliffe and Shelley, the Rosemonts had learned much about the history and the situation of the anarchist movement in Britain and on the Continent in the 60s. Radcliffe also introduced them to other London anarchists, including Lilian Wolf (whose activity in the movement dated back to World War I), Nicholas Walter, and others around Freedom Press.

Clearly, surrealism in the US was *steeped* in anarchism, and anarchist theory and practice provided much of the revolutionary ardor that has characterized “Chicago Idea” surrealism from the very beginning. Several of the original band of Windy City surrealists were active as anarchists long before they encountered surrealism. In addition to Marszalek, who considered himself a Bakuninist, anarchopacifist Tor Faegre did jail-time for his part in the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) campaign against nuclear submarines. Later it turned out that several “at large” members of the Chicago Surrealist Group also had strong anarchist connections. Eugenio F. Granell, who had fought in the work-



ers' militia during the Spanish Revolution, worked closely with anarchist refugees as editor of *España Libre* in New York. Up until his death in 2004, Jerome Kamrowski retained fond memories of Carlo Tresca in 1940s New York.

Philip Lamantia, who died in 2005, while in his youth, was a close friend of fellow hipster, anarchist seaman, and poet John Hoffman. While still in his teens, he was a regular reader of *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (Rosemont, "Lamantia," p. 8-9) and belonged to an Italian-language anarchist group in San Francisco, some of whose members, including Tony Martocchia, had been close associates of Errico Malatesta before emigrating to the US. During the 40s, the young Lamantia was a contributor to the New York-based surrealist magazine, *Triple V*. In 1946, he became part of poet Kenneth Rexroth's Anarchist Circle in San Francisco, and, in the spring of 1947, he and Sanders Russell produced the single issue magazine *Ark*, which featured many of the Circle's writers and reprinted George Woodcock's pamphlet, "What Is Anarchism?" As editors, Russell and Lamantia's anarchism in these pages emphasized individual acts of refusal in relation to voting and war.

In the early 50s, Lamantia participated in poetry readings at the King Ubu Gallery, which was undertaken as a cooperative project for artists and poets, and named after Alfred Jarry's absurdist play *Ubu Roi*, which had been much admired by the French surrealists. Later, it was the old Ubu space that was taken over in 1954 by the Gallery Six, which in 1955 hosted an evening of poetry that included Lamantia, and publicly introduced The Beat Movement to the world (Blechman, pp. 137-153). In terms of the Chicago Surrealist Group, it was Lamantia who urged readers of *Arsenal* #3 (1976) to choose the "Promethian priorities of the *mad lover of freedom*, the *masterless master* and the *poetic criminal*!" (Sakolsky, p. 440). In 1981, he told Franklin Rosemont that he was becoming "more and more of an anarchist everyday." In 1982, in an interview with Paul Buhle, Lamantia recalled that at his first meeting with Breton during the latter's exile in New York, "I told him I felt close to the anarchist position [and] he told me that he did too" (Guglielmo/Salerno, p. 129).

Richly complex in its history and the diversity of its rhizomatic offshoots, Chicago surrealism is hard to cavalierly dismiss in toto as just another tired case of "leftism." Chicago's surrealists and their trans-continental co-dreamers have always recognized themselves in: anarchism's constant emphasis on freedom and direct action; its critique of the church, state, and other authoritarian institutions; and its inherently



countercultural dimension. At the same time, they remain critical of the rationalism and positivism that traditionally have dominated (and in their view, disfigured) certain aspects of anarchist thought, as well as of the *laissez-faire* pragmatic praxis of too many anarchists, which seems to them indistinguishable from bourgeois liberalism. Surrealists have found much to admire in the writings of classical anarchists—Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Emma Goldman, and others—but they tend to prefer the works of such less-well-known anarchist theorists as Gustav Landauer and Marie-Louise Berneri, whose fervent devotion to the cause of self-emancipation was enhanced not only by their outspoken rejection of rationalist mysticism, but also by their passionate receptiveness to the insurrectionary power of the poetic imagination, and, indeed, the realization of poetry in everyday life.

### **Surrealism's Continuing Relevance in the US Today**

One way of gauging the continuing relevance of surrealism in the current anarchist milieu can be grasped by reference to the anarchist press. In the twenty-first century, surrealist contributions have found their way into both *Fifth Estate* and *Green Anarchy*. In spite of the sometimes vituperative public exchanges between these two publications, each one found certain texts associated with the Chicago Surrealist Group that peaked their interest and resonated with their own unique visions.

In the case of *Green Anarchy*, as recently as the Summer of 2005, they reprinted an article by Penelope Rosemont, entitled, “Habitual Ritual? Or Free As The Wind?,” from her book, *Surrealist Experiences* (1999). Previously, in *Green Anarchy* (Winter 2004), Rosemont’s “A Brief Rant Against Work” was excerpted from that same book. As early as Fall 2002, they reprinted a piece originally put out by the Chicago Surrealist Group over 30 years earlier, and later published in *Surrealist Subversions* (Sakolsky, pp. 374-5), entitled, “The Anteater’s Umbrella: A Contribution To The Critique of the Ideology of Zoos.” The “Anteater’s Umbrella” article first saw the light of day long before the term “animal rights” had ever been coined and before the existence of the Animal Liberation Front. Deeming its contemporary relevance to be undiminished, the *Green Anarchy* editors tellingly prefaced the republication of the piece as follows:

Initially distributed at Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo in the early Seventies, this obscure leaflet tackles the issue of animal liberation from a revolutionary perspective not a moralistic one, and is much more reflective of how many of us involved with Green An-

archy feel about that particular struggle than the purely ethical arguments put forth by the mainstream animal rights movement.

Obviously, the *Green Anarchy* editors weren't confusing surrealism with a defunct avant garde art genre. As they explained in their Summer, 2005 issue, "The surrealist movement is more a revolutionary movement than an art movement."

Though thoroughly modernist in one sense, surrealists have sought to reclaim poetry as a lived experience, indeed the primal experience of life. As Benjamin Péret noted in an article entitled "Poetry Above All" in the November 15, 1958 issue of *Bief: Jonction Surréaliste*,

Poetry and art cannot rely on science for their take-off. There is no reason for accepting its tutelage, as is proposed by the Situationist International which imagines itself to be the bearer of the new while creating merely equivocation and confusion  
(Péret, 1970, p. 24).

By valuing the *connection* between the "modern" and the "mythic," surrealism can be distinguished from most other leftist groups, including situationism. As Penelope Rosemont has put it,

Reject as much as possible of civilization. Look again at 'primitive' social organizations—the communism that allowed humans to live at peace with the Earth for eons, before the advent of property, church and state. We have much to relearn from the 'archaic' consciousness that adored mountains and trees and regarded wolves and ravens as brothers and sisters  
(Rosemont, P. in Sakolsky, 2002, p. 604).

In comparison, Debord decreed, "Surrealist dreams are mere bourgeois impotence, artistic nostalgia, and a refusal to envisage the liberating use of our era's superior technological means" (McDonough, 2002, p. 68). To the situationists, the surrealists had put the cart before the horse. In Debord's estimation, one had to rationalize the world before one could impassion it (Jappe, 1999, p. 155). Yet from a surrealist perspective, if one had to wait until "after the revolution" to dream, perhaps it was Debord who had confused the cart with the horse.

In a surrealist context, "The Anteaters Umbrella" can be seen as a scathing critique of civilization itself. While avoiding sentimentality, at the same time it builds upon Debord's insights in relation to "the spectacle" to make

it abundantly clear that the imprisonment of animals in zoos is about far more than the rights of animals. Here is an excerpt from that 1971 leaflet:

It is not without significance that animals in the zoo are *captured* and brought against their wills to this, the penitentiary of the instincts.... Here in the zoo, in this place of hypnotic fascination, human beings come to see *their own instincts* caged and sterilized. Everything that is intrinsic to humankind, but smothered by capitalist society, reappears *safely* in the zoo. Aggression, sexuality, motion, desire, play, the very impulses to freedom are trapped and displayed for the alienated enjoyment and manipulation of men, women and children. Here is the harmless *spectacle* [italics mine] in which everything desired by human beings exists only to the degree that it is separated from the reality of human existence. The cages are merely the extensions of the cages that omnipresently infest the lives of all living beings..... Here the animals are placed in the unnatural habitat of a society unnatural to itself. All that has been natural and a source of pleasure, for animals, has been converted into the performative slavery of a zoological bastille. (Sakolsky, pp. 374-375)

Clearly, while the situationists regarded surrealism as having nothing to offer them, surrealists have not been reluctant to advance situationist concepts as complementary to their own on occasion.

In the same Fall of 2002 that the *Green Anarchy* reprint appeared, *Fifth Estate* published a special issue on “Surreality, Anarchy and Poetry,” simultaneously with the publication of the book *Surrealist Subversions* (Sakolsky, 2002). In many ways, this article before you now—which originally appeared in embryonic form in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* (Fall/Winter, 2003/2004)—is a further elaboration of issues that were first tentatively raised in that anthology. And so too is the book which you now hold in your hands.

## Conclusion

Both surrealism and anarchism are “lived” philosophies rather than academic abstractions or museum relics. Both have been pronounced dead many times—but are very much alive and vital today.

While they are by no means identical, they share many affinities which can be mutually reinforcing. As an excursion into the realm of intellectual history, it has been my intention in this article to delineate the his-

torical links between these two unruly “isms” upon which their current interactions are based. As I see it, there is nothing intrinsic about them that should keep them apart and there is much in the way of passional attraction to throw them into each other’s arms. As the Chicago Surrealist Group proclaimed early on within a Manifesto found in the first issue of *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* (1970), “The love of freedom and the freedom of love will make love in the bed of freedom.” May it be so.

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—Schlechter Duvall, "The Mask of Anarchy"

# Anarcho-Surrealist Poetics

My poetry is truly an incitement to insubordination and revolt. And that is why my motto is that of the anarchists:  
Neither God Nor Master!

—Carmen Bruna,  
“Poetry and Incitement to Revolt”  
in Penelope Rosemont,  
ed., *Surrealist Women*, 1998

What are the poetic affinities between surrealism and anarchism? For both surrealists and anarchists, imagination is at the heart of the matter. In a nutshell, surrealists seek the realization of poetry in everyday life. As Franklin Rosemont explains, “The tasks of poetry in our time clearly exceed the formal limitations of the poem, and require the continuation of poetry by other means” (2002, p. 441).

Such a desired transformation of life goes hand in hand with anarchy in that both envision a world free of domination. Turning the present reality upside down, anarchists refuse and oppose any form of hierarchy and instead embrace the idea of individual freedom and the practice of mutual aid. To surrealists, the ability to formulate such a sweeping reconceptualization of the world is a tribute to the insurrectionary power of the imagination. From a surrealist perspective, then, the liberating of the poetic imagination disrupts the routinized legitimacy of the existing order.

In this regard, surrealism seeks to erase the artificial dichotomy between dream and reality. In so doing, it can challenge the kneejerk conformity to consensus reality that keeps us imprisoned in what

William Blake, as if in anticipation of both anarchism and surrealism, once poetically referred to as “mind-forged manacles.”

In contrast, by imagining a world beyond what is presently deemed “possible,” one can move in a revolutionary direction. Anarchists and surrealists alike celebrate the Bakuninist desire to destroy that which confines our imagination, sabotage what keeps us enslaved, and create revolutionary change. Both demand the impossible! As surrealist dreamer Franklin Rosemont poetically reminds us, “At this point in history, the impossible seems to be the least we can demand of each other” (*Wrong Numbers*, p. 163).

In his pivotal 1938 essay on “Poetry and Anarchism,” English anarchist and poet Herbert Read (who was himself philosophically attracted to surrealism) explained the correspondences between poetry and anarchism. As he conceived it,

The poet has two principal duties: to mirror the world as it is and to imagine the world as it might be... In order to create it is necessary to destroy, and the agent of destruction in society is the poet. I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist and that he must oppose all organized conceptions of the State, not only those which we inherit from the past, but equally those which are imposed on people in the name of the future. In this I make no distinction between fascism and Marxism. (pp. 58 and 74)

To further elaborate upon such an understanding of the poet as disturber of the established order, we can refer to French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret, who fought in the Spanish Revolution on the side of the anarchists. As he once put it in a 1945 essay entitled “The Dishonour of Poetry,” “It is up to the poet to give voice to words always sacrilegious, to permanent blasphemies. Every authentic poem issues a breath of absolute and active freedom” (pp. 201 and 206).

The radical nature of anarcho-surrealist poetics can be contrasted with what surrealists decry as “miserabilism.” Miserabilism is a system which produces misery and then rationalizes it by perpetuating the idea that such misery comprises the only possible reality. For examples of miserabilism, just pick up any newspaper, turn on the radio, or click on the TV. Instead of the depreciation of reality characteristic of miserabilism, André Breton proposed its exaltation. Denouncing miserabilism,

surrealism seeks out and embraces what it calls Marvelous Freedom. The surrealist seizure of, and expansion upon reality, is not mere escapism. Instead, it is analogous to the active pursuit of the dream of an anarchic society envisioned and propelled by the insurgent imagination.

Anarcho-surrealist poetics pits the poet against the “don’t rock the boat” because “this is the best of all possible worlds” mentality of the miserabilist status quo. As surrealist poet Philip Lamantia once put it in a letter to Breton,

A true revolutionary poet cannot help defying every appalling social and political instrument that has been the cause of death and exploitation in the capitalistic societies of the earth. To rebel! That is the immediate objective of poets! . . . The poetic marvelous and the ‘unconscious’ are the true inspirers of rebels and poets!

(in Rosemont, in Guglielmo and Salerno, p. 128)

For anarchist theorist and poet Wolfi Landstreicher, the poet’s path is likewise an adventurous one characterized by the ardent rejection of the dominant society’s values. As he has explained,

I agree with the surrealist idea that poetry is an expression of the marvelous. In order to write poetically one must live poetically. When I speak of poetry, I am not talking about versifying or wordsmithing. I am speaking about creating lives of passion, intensity, and wonder. (pp. 1 and 45)

As for myself, this desire to live poetically has, at key moments in my life, been illuminated by dancing visions of both surrealism and anarchy. And each has bounced off the other’s radiant energy with the intense dynamics of a spontaneous musical improvisation, taking me way beyond the stale chord changes of a settled (for) reality and on to the subversive path of radical creativity.

In her characteristically anarchist vein, surrealist poet and visual artist Penelope Rosemont urges us to unleash the revolutionary potential of chance by... Taking Chances! Boldly, she proclaims with implacable resolve: “Throw the floodgates through an open window!” (Sakolsky, p. 664). What next? Who knows? But imagine, if you will, a poetry without floodgates, the ensuing flood carrying us with its poetic force into uncharted waters. Swept away, we swim, surf, tumble, and drift our

way toward the empyrean shores of surrealist poet Philip Lamantia's "commune of Anarchs" (*Meadowlark West*, p. 49). This communal space is a location where

words are set free from the prosaic prisons of social reality and images transformed by desire, poetry freed from the "laws" of nature, attentive to the becoming of unknown analogies, words purified by the rays of oneiric desire, language emancipated from the confines of speech, informed by the inner ear and disdainful of "music" other than the rhythms imminent in imaginary thinking.

(Lamantia in Sakolsky, p. 287)

Once on shore, we are welcomed by the dazzling banner of the Unfettered Imagination, as luminous as any lighthouse, as defiantly poetic as any Jolly Roger, singing its fluttering siren song in the wind, flying high above the waves.

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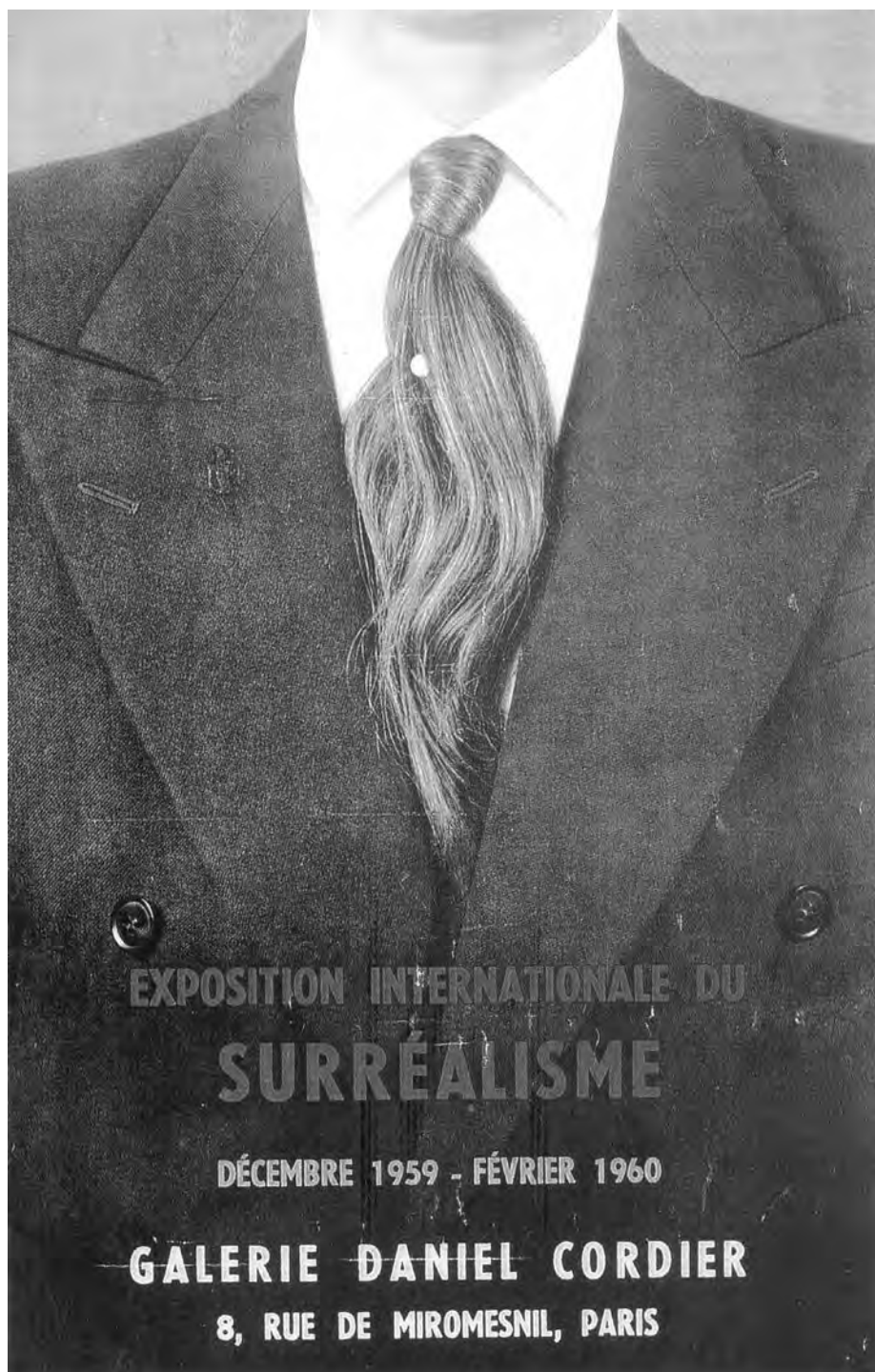
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—Mimi Parent, "Masculin/Féminin"



# Total Refusal

Here come the North Lights and Flight of Wild Bees.

—Leonora Carrington,  
*The Hearing Trumpet*, 1974

Surrealism has been no stranger to Canadian shores. One of the primary avenues for the spread of surrealist ideas in Canada has, not surprisingly, been the French diaspora and the ensuing Québécois cultural connection to France initiated by the Automatists in Montreal. Unlike many Francophone bonds between France and Canada which are of a nationalistic variety, this cosmopolitan affinity to surrealism is of interest to anti-authoritarians because its founding document—the “Total Refusal Manifesto”—was bathed in the dazzling light of what the Autonomists referred to as “splendid anarchy.”

While art alone does not a revolution make, surrealist art—when seen as part of the larger surrealist project of unshackling the imagination—can have revolutionary consequences. As the civilized mask of authoritarian society is torn away, we are free to envision and pursue our wildest dreams.

During his wartime exile in the United States, pivotal surrealist thinker André Breton journeyed to Canada in 1944, where he visited Gaspésie, St. Agathe, and Montreal. The birds which he refers to in his book *Arcanum 17* are those of Bonaventure Island, off Percé, where the poetic nature of the rock formations and the random scattering of agate stones found in walks along the isolated beach might have suggested a “home-grown surrealism” to him (Rogow in Breton, 2004, p. 23). In fact, word of the liberation of Paris from the Nazis first reached him during this Canada sojourn. After the war, in 1953, he broadcast a message on the French language station, Radio-Canada, entitled, “Wither Surrealism Now?” (Breton in *Arsenal*, 1989, pp. 13-14). In this radio broadcast Breton “greatly regrets” that during his Montreal visit he never met the painter Paul Émile Borduas, founder and principal theorist of the *Refus Global* (Total Refusal) collective, generally known as *Les Automatistes* (The Automatists).

The Automatist collective included not only painters, but also poets such as Thérèse Renaud, the youngest of three Automatist-related sisters, and dancers like Francoise Sullivan who sought “tangency with the universe” by dancing to what she called an “oneiric rhythm” (Rosemont, pp. 208/210). Together, the latter two women were the primary organizers of the 1948 Automatist Festival held in Montreal. In the same year, Sullivan performed her famous outdoor improvisation, “Dance In the Snow.” Returning to the visual arts in his radio address, Breton expressed his affinity with the Quebec-based Automatists’ collective in their quest to liberate painting from the shackles of convention. As he put it, “Reading the [Total Refusal] Manifesto (1948) has fully convinced me that . . . on both sides (of the Atlantic) we find the same need to react against suffocation. . . . Indeed, it is well understood that human progress has turned out to be demented . . .” (Breton, 1953, p. 13).

The breath of life then could seemingly only be inhaled by questioning the whole asphyxiating idea of progress, along with its unnaturally “civilized” enclosure of art. The Automatist Manifesto was written by Borduas, with the cover done by one of fifteen co-signers Jean-Paul Riopelle, who was once his student at the École du meuble in Montreal. Within that document, they adamantly opposed the stranglehold of the Catholic church on Quebec’s cultural life and declared their solidarity with Breton and the French movement. As the Manifesto declared,

A new collective hope will be born (MAKE ROOM FOR MAGIC: MAKE ROOM FOR OBJECTIVE MYSTERIES! MAKE ROOM FOR LOVE!/MAKE ROOM FOR NECESSITIES!); within an unimaginable time span, we will see man freed from his useless chains, and, in the unforeseeable order required by spontaneity, in *splendid anarchy* [italics mine] he will fulfill the promise of his individual talents. (Durozoi, p. 492)

By the time of Breton’s radio broadcast, he had already met Borduas in 1945, and some of the Automatists had found their way to Paris and become participants in French surrealism. By 1947, Borduas, along with four other painters, had been part of an Automatist exhibit at the Galerie du Luxembourg in Paris. A co-signer of the Total Refusal Manifesto in 1948, poet Thérèse Renaud, after marrying Automatist painter Fernand Le Duc, moved with him to France where they were active in the Paris Surrealist Group for a short time.

At the École des Beaux Arts de Montréal, assemblagist Jean Benoit and his lifelong companion, painter Mimi Parent, were once students of

pre-Automatist Alfred Pellan, who surrealist historian Gerard Durozoi has called “the first non-conformist artist in Canada” (Durozoi, 2003, p. 68). Along with Pellan and other dissident artists, Benoit and Parent organized the *Prisme d’Yeax* to demand freedom of artistic expression. In this reactionary time (1944-1959) of the “Grande Noirceur” (Great Darkness) in Quebec, characterized by extreme conservatism from both the government of Maurice Duplessis and the Catholic church, Parent was expelled for “insubordination” in relation to an exhibition staged at the school in 1947.

In her *Surrealist Women* anthology, Penelope Rosemont places Parent’s “gardens of earthly desire and other assorted delights and terrors amongst the most splendid paintings of our time, or any time” (Rosemont, p. 278). Durozoi has said of Benoit that he possessed a “mind animated by desire and the memory of a distant and inner savagery” (Durozoi, 2002, p. 653). Parent and Benoit shared an association with the Automatists while in Montreal and left for Paris in 1948.

The couple’s first major Parisian surrealist undertaking was the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1959 which was devoted to Eros and held at the Galerie Daniel Cordier. Parent designed the catalog and was the organizer of the hall devoted to fetishism. Two weeks before the opening of the show, Benoit performed a piece entitled “The Execution of the Testament of the Marquis de Sade” at the apartment of the English-born Egyptian surrealist poet Joyce Mansour. Amidst a soundtrack of thunder, Breton read de Sade’s testament and Parent gradually stripped Benoit of his elaborately fetishized costume (a photograph of which, with the text of the performance, is included in Breton’s *Surrealism and Painting*). As a dramatic finale, the word “SADE” was burned on Benoit’s chest with a branding iron by his own hand. Over the years, both Benoit and Parent have also occasionally been active participants in the various projects of the Surrealist Movement of the United States. But, since originally leaving Montreal, they had not had a museum show in their native province until recently in 2004 at the Musée National De Beaux Arts Du Québec in Quebec City, a little more than a year before Parent’s death in Paris in 2005.

Jean-Paul Riopelle departed from Montreal for Paris in 1947. In the year of his arrival, he was a signer of the Parisian surrealists’ anarchist-friendly *Rupture Inaugural (Inaugural Rupture)* tract and the following year his illustrations began to appear in the surrealist periodical, *Néon*. As he was to put it later in life to interviewer Gilbert Érouart in reflect-

ing upon the reasons for his journey to Paris, “In Québec, to want to change things automatically means revolution so I went off to explore a different reality. I crossed the Atlantic” (Riopelle in Érouart, p. 51). Among the Automatists, his involvement with surrealism was one of the most enduring, and, like Mimi Parent, he was mentioned in Breton’s 1972 book *Surrealism and Painting*. His paintings were included in the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, organized by Breton to create nothing less than a “new mythology.” In 1948, he had a solo show at the Parisian Galerie La Dragonne under surrealist auspices, with Breton himself titling the canvases. In relation to one of three prefaces to his 1949 show at the Galerie Nina Dausset (the others were by André Breton and Benjamin Péret), Gérard Durozoi quotes Elisa Breton on Riopelle as follows:

One could sense in his paintings, already abstract, a subjective interpretation of the Canadian landscape or a description, through the colored prism, of “the very instant in which everything opens out like a fan onto the Arctic.” (Durozoi, p. 501)

Once again, as in the case of the 1929 Surrealist Map of the World in which Labrador absorbs the entire Canadian mainland, the surrealist imaginary vis a vis Canada had been situated in the wilds of the Far North by Parisian surrealists. Riopelle, though he didn’t seek to have his identity be synonymous with his Canadian origins, was nevertheless romantically dubbed “the peerless trapper” by Breton. His elliptical words refer here to,

Traps set not only for burrowing animals but also for the animals of cloud formations . . . What reconciles me to the idea of a trap, which is not among my favorite objects, is that these are also traps for traps. Once these traps have been trapped, a high degree of freedom will have been attained. (Breton, 1972, p. 218)

Similarly, French surrealist poet, Benjamin Péret described Riopelle’s work once again under the sign of Canadian wilderness, “The aurora borealis, this trembling of a cloud is without any doubt beginning her rowdy dance with legs of flame and flowering skirts. She will soon dominate the whole scene where Riopelle lives like the screech of a gull” (Breton, 1972, p. 279).

We started this piece with surrealist painter/writer Leonora Carrington’s evocation of a massing of wild Canadian bees. In her novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, they aid and abet the Great Goddess in reclaiming

her Holy Cup. In it, we experience a primal Canada animated by the alchemy of the Marvelous, the wonder of fairy tales, and the trickster magic of Native creation stories.

The air was filled with a humming and a drumming of wings, and millions of bumble bees gathered over our heads and formed a great female figure over the boiling cauldron. The swarm shimmered and shook in the formation of the giantess. The figure buzzed and shimmered, then somewhere from the depths of the body made from so many millions of bees came a voice so unbearably sweet that we felt drowned in honey. 'I am Anubeth, High Queen of the Wolves!' The Goddess hummed with a million voices and drops of honey fell like manna from the roof of the cavern. We were covered with a most delicious perfumed stickiness and were obliged to lick ourselves clean. The swarm now dispersed, breaking the body of the Goddess into millions of shining fragments.

(Carrington, p. 197)

Enter the Northern Lights!

*Special thanks to Jacques Desniens, Doug Imrie, and Bernard Sanschagrin for helping to conceptualize this piece.*

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—Surrealist Map of the World, 1929

# A Surrealist Re-Imagining of Canada

We had to journey to Canada to find the Wolf King.

—Leonora Carrington,  
*The Hearing Trumpet*, 1974

The unbounded territory of the imagination known as surrealism has always included what is called Canada. From its earliest years, European surrealists have recognized Canada as a realm of the marvelous precisely because it was so un-European. While many Canadians pride themselves on their links to Britain and the Royal Family or to France, surrealists have downplayed these connections. Instead, right from the start, they proclaimed their affinity with Canadian wilderness and indigenous peoples by publishing what has come to be known as *The Surrealist Map of the World*. Originally appearing in the surrealist issue of the Belgian review *Variétés* in 1929 under the title, “Le Monde au temps des surréalistes” (The World in the Time of the Surrealists), it has been attributed to French surrealist painter Yves Tanguy. The map is notable not only for its “plotting against Eurocentrism” as David Roediger has so brilliantly illuminated (Sakolsky, pp. 327-331), but for, what would now be called in anarchist circles, its “anti-civilization” content.

In fact, the anti-civilization tendency has a certain resonance with the surrealist project that distinguishes the latter from narrowly rationalist modernist and post-modernist thinking in its embrace of the savage nature of all human animals. To such pivotal surrealist thinkers as André Breton, our alienation from our intrinsic nature as human beings stems at a very basic level from our supposed superiority to animals. While in World War II exile, during a three month stay in a remote cabin on Canada’s Gaspé Peninsula near Percé Rock and in walking distance from the bird sanctuary island of Bonaventure, Breton penned these words:



“At the top of the list of initial errors that remain the most detrimental stands the idea that the universe only has intelligible meaning for mankind, and that it has none for animals. Man prides himself on being the chosen of creation” (*Arcanum*, p. 58).

Shortly thereafter, in a 1946 interview with Jean Duché in *Le Littéraire*, he elaborated further, “[Surrealists] in no way accept that nature is hostile to man, but suppose that man, who originally possessed certain keys that kept him in strict communion with nature, has lost these keys, and that since then, he persists more and more feverishly in trying out others that don’t fit” (*Conversations*, p. 206). In a lecture given in Prague in 1935, Breton urged his audience to “liberate instinctive impulses, to break down the barrier that civilized man faces, a barrier that primitive people and children do not experience” (Choucha, p. 72).

In reference to Tanguy’s depiction of Canada, the surrealist contempt for the European imperial project—and its critique of civilization itself— is, shall we say, all over the map. Indeed, Labrador has absorbed the entire mainland of Canada. Historically, aside from the obvious First Nations’ claims, the legal possession of Labrador was disputed between Quebec and Newfoundland (itself not then even a part of Canada). In 1927, the British Privy Council, not surprisingly, awarded Labrador to Newfoundland. While the French-Canadian connection vis a vis Québec might have called the attention of French surrealists like Tanguy to what was then a recent dispute, instead of operating in terms of French diasporic nationalism and simply redrawing the map with Labrador granted to Québec, the surrealist resolution of this conflict has Labrador absorb almost all of what was then Canada, including Québec and Newfoundland as well.

In so doing, the surrealist map magically returns Canada to Native sovereignty. In this sense, Tanguy’s re-imagining of the map of Canada demonstrates surrealism’s admiration for the primal art and culture of Native peoples, such as Labrador’s Inuit, and a passionate attraction to wilderness that recognizes the utter expendability of the imported European civilization. For Tanguy, all of what was then Canada became Labrador, except for the seemingly autonomous little corner of Canada nearest to where I presently reside, represented on the surrealist map by the Queen Charlotte Islands (shown in French as *Iles Charlotte* and known to the Native people of the Northwest Coast as *Haida Gwaii*). The obvious connection here was surrealism’s reverence for the awe-

inspiring Haida totem poles and carvings. As Breton once put it in a 1945 interview with René Bélance in the *Haiti Journal*,

Surrealism is allied with people of color, on the one hand because it has always been on their side against every form of white imperialism and banditry, as demonstrated by the manifestoes published in Paris against the Moroccan War and the Colonial Exhibit; on the other hand, because there are very deep affinities between so-called “primitive” thought and surrealist thought: both want to overthrow the hegemony of consciousness and daily life, in order to conquer the realm of revelatory emotion.

(*Conversations*, p. 193)

Consequently, the surrealists urge us to forget about that old colonialist mapmaker, Mercator, and we might now add, even the more progressive Arno Peters. Instead they ask: What if you could design a map of the world that made no pretense to realistic cartographic boundaries? Back in 1929, surrealists imagined a world without Empire. On their map, the UK ceased to exist. Its future imperial successor—the continental USA—was literally wiped off the face of the earth, emphasizing instead the wild tundras and “Eskimo” people of Alaska, and the Oceanic culture of Hawaii, which at that time had not yet been absorbed as an American state. In understanding this reconfiguration, we might ponder what surrealist poet Benjamin Péret once noted: “The entire spiritual life of humanity since the beginning of its consciousness is condensed in poetry: it rushes forth in the mythical tales of the Eskimo” (Péret, p. 1).

The surrealist map implicitly poses the question, “Why not demolish imperialism at its very source?” Given twenty-first century American imperial history, an interesting contemporary footnote is that while the USA has been transformed out of existence on this map, Afghanistan retains its fabled position as a fertile East-West crossroads. So while the surrealist map does not totally eliminate the nation state as a point of reference, it recognizes Native autonomy and affirms a basis of sovereignty rooted not in realpolitik, but with reference to the only true surrealist compass, the radical trajectory of the unfettered imagination.

In the same spirit as that which animated *The Surrealist Map of the World*, African American surrealist poet Ted Joans, who spent the last several years of his life residing in Vancouver, once made the link between

surrealism and the resistance of primal peoples to imperial civilization by remarking with obvious delight:

We tip our Magritte chapeau-melon, our Fats Waller derby, and our Charlie Chaplin bowler to the Maori in New Zealand who flipped up the back of his piupiu to reveal his naked butt—the greatest Maori traditional insult—to the visiting British Charles and Diana, of the greatest parasitic family in Europe. (Sakolsky, 2002, p. 255)

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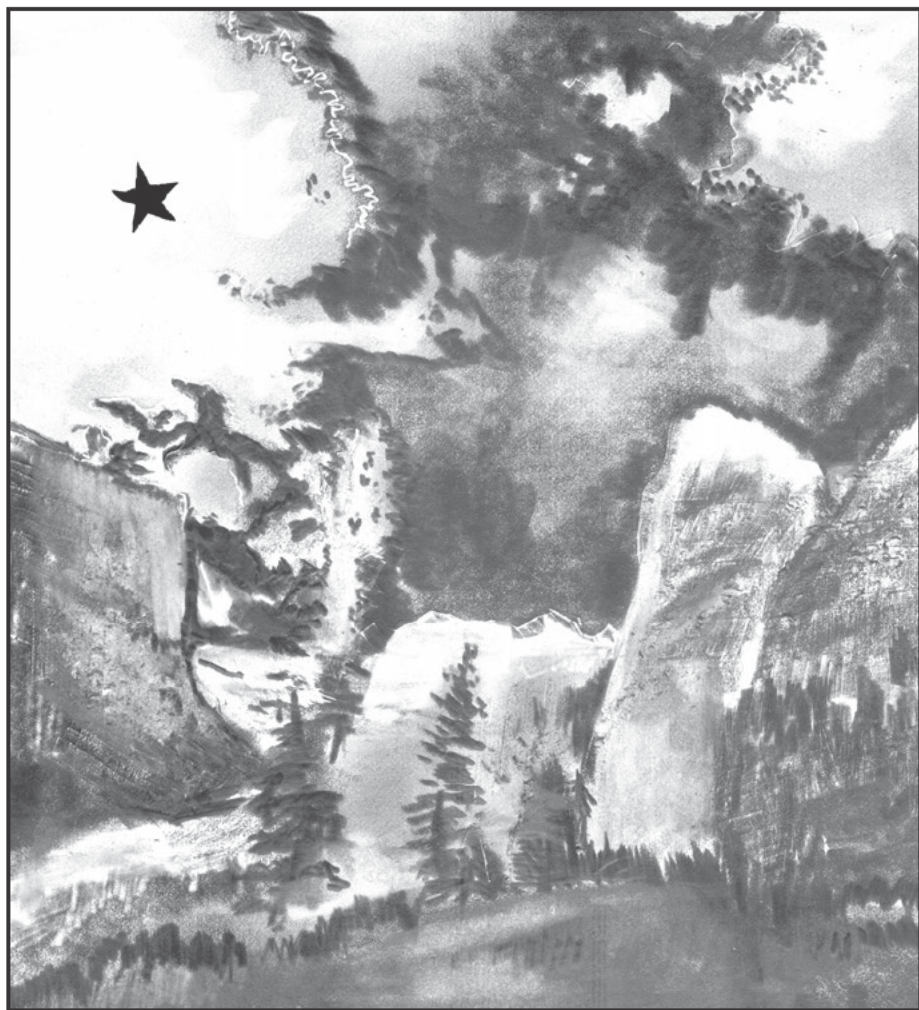
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—Viva Jackson

# Black Star North

A single star weds the space between two branches.

—George Elliott Clarke,  
*Québécois: A Jazz Fantasia in Three Cantos*, 2003.

Lately, I have chosen to do my living, loving, writing, and resisting in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Though I can't say that I'm an expatriot, since I have always despised patriotism, I am currently an expatriate. Canada has long been a destination of choice for American political dissidents like myself, and for such refugees from US oppression as the enslaved Africans who followed the North Star to the last stop on the Underground Railroad (though slavery was by no means illegal in Canada).

In 2000, the now deceased African American surrealist poet, Ted Joans, put a new wrinkle on that maroon tradition by swearing that he would move to Canada if George W Bush became President. Immediately after the election, he moved to Vancouver. For a variety of reasons, in 2002, I followed his ambulatory example by moving to one of the Northern Gulf Islands (which are located in the Strait of Georgia between the West Coast of the Canadian mainland and Vancouver Island). Finally fed up, I had escaped the belly of the beast to seek sanctuary on Denman Island (or *Sla-dai-aich* in the Pentlatch tongue). And now in 2005, with Bush gloating over the prospect of having a second term in which to spend his newly minted political capital, the tramp Northwards grows daily. For about a month after last year's American presidential sweepstakes, the mainstream Canadian press frequently featured a story on the "Reverse Brain Drain" or the burgeoning "Gay Exodus" or the "Liberal Flight" North.

As an anarchist in voluntary exile, I've never looked back. What's hardest about being an expatriate, though, is that many people here,

especially other expats, assume that I am uncritical of Canada and even want to become a citizen. Actually, I prefer Canada to the US with the same wariness that makes me prefer a good cop to a bad cop, never forgetting that both the good and bad cop are often part of the same police state entrapment scenario and neither should be trusted with my liberty. Though I am now considered a “permanent resident” of Canada, I have no interest in becoming a Canadian citizen or swearing allegiance to the English queen in order to do so. I am acutely aware of the fact that Queen Elizabeth is not only despicable because she is the embodiment of colonial monarchy, but that her official status is especially irksome in Canada given the intensity of the cultural ties that link Québec to the Francophone diaspora. The ubiquitous appearance of the queen on Canadian currency and in every post office in the nation exposes the hypocritical lie of self-righteous Canadian shibboleths like “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism,” even in reference to the so-called “founding nations” from Europe.

That I am already considered a citizen of one country is *more* than enough of an imposition on my freedom as far as I’m concerned. Instead of defining myself in statist terms, let’s just say that the borderless rain-forested bioregion of Cascadia (which defiantly oozes across the officially designated boundaries of the Northwestern US and the West Coast of Canada) feels more like home than anywhere else I’ve ever lived. When I was first asked by *Fifth Estate* to write an expatriate piece shortly after I arrived in Canada, I felt that it was premature. After having lived here for a few years though, it seems that I can now reflect on that experience with some perspective. So here’s my “letter home.”

For starters, I am very aware that I reside on stolen land. Radical folks in these parts often paraphrase the Canadian national anthem’s bromide of “my home and native land” by substituting the more revealing: “my home *on* Native land.” Much of BC still remains unceded and indigenous title to the land has never been extinguished. As I write this piece, Native resistance to Canada continues across the province with long and short term land occupations and direct action blockades emphasizing decolonization and self-determination stretching from Sutikalh (St’at’imc territory) or, in colonial terms, Melvin Creek to Skwelkwek’welt (Shuswap territory) or, as the ski resort-minded settlers have renamed it, Sun Peaks to Haida Gwaii (Haida territory), or in the terms of the conquerors, the Queen Charlotte Islands. Given the context of the ongoing low intensity warfare against Aboriginal peoples in Canada, such indigenous acts of rebellion and resistance to the onslaught of colonialism, resource industry extraction, tourism, and gentrification are ironically considered to be trespassing by the Canadian government, and therefore, subject to



suppression by the State. As always since the original European invasion, the struggle for land and liberty continues unabated.

The picture I paint here is not that of maverick filmmaker Michael Moore's sanitized and romanticized version of Canada which he frequently uses as a dramatic foil in opposition to the US propaganda machine's version of America the Beautiful. On the most basic level, many Canadians have never examined their own complicity in genocide against the Native population, or their privileged position in the American Empire, and smugly take pride in Moore's idealization of Canada. Such left-liberal American cultural products as "Bowling for Columbine" are problematic when seen in a Canadian context because they readily lend themselves to a self-congratulatory sense of historical denial on the part of the viewing audience. Even the much ballyhooed Canadian health care system is racked with class inequity, and its threadbare integrity is increasingly threatened by the prospect of corporate privatization.

However, Canadians generally seem to be less arrogant than their US counterparts in relation to world politics. Canadians, for the most part, don't grow up thinking that their country is the center of the universe or that they are the toughest kid on the global block in the way that most Americans do. This is not to say that Canada is idyllic.

Domestically, white supremacy continues to rear its ugly head across the country with a constant flow of cases of police brutality against Native peoples and urbanized people of color in general. Moreover, there exists a virulent strain of racism against Asians that, after a series of anti-Chinese race riots on the West Coast in the 1880s and 1890s, culminated in the internment of Canadians of Japanese ancestry during World War II in the BC interior, and still lurks beneath the surface of the Pacific Rim prosperity of Western Canada.

In the BC interior, 1995's Battle of Ts'Peten (Gustafsen Lake) is emblematic of the deep-seated nature of racism employed against those the Canadian government loves to patronizingly label as "First Nations" peoples, which ranges from the now defunct assimilationist residential schools designed to eradicate Native culture to land grabs which imply the threat of armed combat as the ultimate enforcement tactic. The crisis situation there erupted around the indigenous defense of the freedom to hold sun dance ceremonies on disputed lands that are traditional Secwepemc territory. It ended in a standoff against one of the biggest mobilizations of Canadian military forces since the crushing of Louis Riel and the Métis resistance in 1885. In fact, what is now an institutionalized national symbol in the form of the Mounties or Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was itself originally created as a quasi-military police force in that same nineteenth century war to appropriate Métis land and resources.

Yet, on the global stage, Canadians are typically reluctant to see themselves as the cops of the world. They often have to be cajoled or threatened by the Colossus of the South to join its imperial wars or else face economic sanctions and a loss of their privileged status in the New World Order. However, sometimes the Canadian government does refuse to send in combatants, as was the case in Iraq. In that instance, however, they are still deeply implicated in the war as a result of the presence of Canadian troops originally stationed in Afghanistan to “rebuild” that country, and, lately, to be used as a combat force in the wake of the London (UK) bombings of July, 2005, as well as the presence of Camp Mirage, the recently exposed “secret” Canadian desert air base near Dubai (the United Arab Emirate’s second largest city) which is used for the support of Afghan military operations.

These Canadian troop deployments not so coincidentally free US troops to be used in an attempt to pacify and occupy Iraq and to enhance the financial gains made by Canadian weapons manufacturers during the war. Revealingly, Canada, with an eye toward post-election contracts, assumed a leadership role in monitoring the 2005 Iraqi election as a key collaborator in the US-led propaganda war to redefine the Bush regime’s act of blatant aggression and occupation as liberation.

Though the preferred Canadian self-image is that of international peacemaker in contrast to their belligerent neighbors, in fact, they are in bed with American foreign policy operatives in matters at home ranging from their joint military operation at NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) to still raging debates about the future of the latest scheme for a “son-of-Star Wars” missile defense shield system.

Furthermore, these two governments engage in joint immigration clampdowns aimed at harassing, detaining, and arresting those who are labeled as potential terrorists. A case in point is that of Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian citizen deported in the wake of 9-11 hysteria by US authorities at JFK airport in New York after returning from a personal trip to Tunisia in 2002, and sent *not* back to Canada where he could not be arrested, charged or jailed because of Charter of Rights protections, but rather to be tortured in a Syrian prison with the secret complicity of the Canadian government and US security officials. Beyond deportation, from the case of the American Indian Movement’s Leonard Peltier in 1976, to the John Graham case (in relation to Anna Mae Pictou Aquash) today, and finally, the recent capture of “environmental terrorist” Tre Arrow in BC, extradition agreements between Canada and the US have long been a stealth weapon used against domestic radicals criminalized by the American government.

Of course, Canada has in the recent past been a haven for US citizens of draft age fleeing colonial wars, most notably the Vietnam War, when large numbers of draft refusers converged on Canada. As the Flying Burrito Brothers once put it in "My Uncle," a seminal song from that era, "I'm headin' for the nearest foreign border/Vancouver may be just my kind of town/Cause they don't need the kind of law and order/That tends to keep a good man underground." As recently as 2004, the festering controversy over these Vietnam era draft dodgers resurfaced when a public monument to them slated to be built in Nelson, BC came under attack by the Bushies during the American election campaign.

And history seems to be repeating itself. These days, Canadians talk about the latest exodus from the USA to Canada as the "second wave." Military deserters are already seeking asylum here and can be seen barnstorming around Canada with their anti-Iraq war message. Like the draft resisters of the Sixties, these new refugees are often seeking to escape their entrapment in the "poverty draft" which is the foundation of the current "volunteer" army. So far, official political refugee status has not been granted by the Canadian courts to any deserters because they are considered to originally have "volunteered." Nevertheless, their numbers are likely to increase if the war continues to expand, and especially, if full-on conscription is required once again. Even now, pre-emptive plans are in the works for tough new high tech monitoring devices at the border requested by US warmakers in order to impede the expected flight of draft resisters to Canada.

As for me, long past draft age, I'm more a refugee from the battles of the culture wars that have ravaged the US psyche and provided fertile ground for that miserabilist brand of fascist Fortress America fundamentalism now being marketed as the "war on terrorism." As a radical looking at the US from afar, I'm elated by both the growing anti-war/global liberation movements and the increasing efforts to disrupt the social peace. Perhaps if I were a bit younger with legs that could still outrun the cops and if my partner wasn't Canadian-born, I might have stayed Stateside to fight the good fight in the churning belly of the imperial beast.

While I still am engaged in that struggle in a variety of ways from my Northern vantage point, lately, my political action, research, and writing have taken a decidedly Canadian turn. All of a sudden, I want to know as much as I can about radical Canadian history: from the bold decisiveness of the Vancouver 5/Direct Action in the 1980s to the more recent Carnival Against Capitalism during Québec City's anti-globalization protests in relation to the Summit of the Americas meeting there in the Spring of 2001; from historical accounts of the Tolstoyian Doukhobor war resisters and property burners who arrived in the Kootenay area of

BC from Russia just after the turn of the twentieth century to past utopian experiments in the Gulf Islands to the Mohawk warriors at Kanesatake (Oka, Québec) who, in 1990, defended traditional burial grounds against the expansion of a golf course; and, from there, to the Mikmaq defenders in Burnt Church (New Brunswick) who took direct action in relation to upholding their traditional rights of lobstering and fishing as recently as 2000; and, of course, the mass civil disobedience and active resistance campaigns in relation to the threatened clearcutting of the ancient old growth rainforests of Clayoquot Sound in BC during the summer of 1993, which included several of my present brother/sister islanders here on Denman. (These are just a few of the things that you never learn about Canada in the States if you learn about Canada at all). And last year, I reveled in the sprawling splendor of Montreal's Anarchist Book Fair and did a workshop on the history of anarcho-surrealism in Canada. With the parallel three week long Festival of Anarchy, it is the largest of such book fair events in North America.

Similarly, my current anti-authoritarian focus is a local one. Today, you'll find me rolling up my sleeves on Denman Island, helping to put on the annual anarchist gathering here or doing my part to foment opposition to development and gentrification threats and for island autonomy in solidarity with Native sovereignty. Moreover, lots of juicy creative projects keep life here in the Comox Valley exciting: from helping to set up a free radio station to originating a new anarchist zine named *The Oystercatcher* to being a founding member of an improvisational sound collage trio which experiments with layers of "bootlegged" recorded music in a surrealist fashion.

As I approach 60 years of age, I take guidance from the sage words of the late George Woodcock, another anarchist expatriate of sorts who lived out the last part of his life in BC. As he put it so well, "I catch myself feeling glad I'm young in an aging body, hoping I'll experience everything intensely to the end."

Note: *Black Star North* was the original name of the zine, now called *Communicating Vessels*, where I first heard of the land of *Minus Tides*, the place where I now reside.

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—Clifford Harper



# Dancing Waves

The Green Man has a big onion patch and he eats onions for supper. That makes him very strong and he jumps in the river. And he learns fish language.

—Peter Schumann,  
*Green Man*, 1996

## What If?

**T**he Orkney islands lie off the northern tip of Scotland, where the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean meet. I set sail for magical Orkney about twenty years ago (well, it was actually a ferryboat). I was following a sprightly fiddle tune called “Dancing Waves” which I had heard on an obscure 1979 Folkways Record entitled *Music From The Orkney Islands*, in a rendition by Hugh Inkster of Kirkwall. It was a ferryboat too, which deposited me on Denman’s fair shores just after the publication of my book *Surrealist Subversions*, by following a Czech surrealist clue located in the local anarchist publication *Minus Tides*. Only after I’d left my old landlocked Illinois life behind and moved here lock, stock, and barrel did I discover that Canada’s most well-known anarchist philosopher George Woodcock was a frequenter of Denman on his way to neighboring Hornby Island to visit his good friend, the painter Jack Shadbolt—a fact that appealed to my sense of anarchist synchronicity. Yet even earlier, it had become increasingly apparent that Orkney and Denman share a common heritage, fermented in an ancestral brew of anarchist history.

Shortly after arriving, I picked up a copy of *My Ain Folk Revisited*, and read on page one, “Settlers began arriving in the 1870s from Britain. For a while Denman was known locally as ‘Orkney Island’ because of the number of settlers arriving from the Orkneys.” Now, while Orcadians get visibly upset when their archipelago of seventy islands (seventeen of which are inhabited by humans) is referred to as “the Orkneys” in much the same way that Hawaiians would if they heard their islands referred to as the Hawaiis, the book’s “Orkneys” reference struck a (fiddle) chord in me, generating a thirst to discover the hinted at connections between the Canadian island I now called home and the European ones I had once visited.



Beyond European peoples, *My Ain Folk* refers to Denman Island as a “summer home” to the native “Puntledge” (actually Pentlatch) tribe, but, of course, this seasonal reference understates the Native presence here. Aside from survey evidence of a probable Pentlatch village site near what is presently Fillongley Provincial Park (Millen, pp. 4-5), what is now Denman Point was once known, and even appeared on maps, as Village Point. The middens and cedar frames, which dotted the site of this former Pentlatch village as recently as 1864, tell a more permanent story of what must once have been a substantial indigenous community, as do the petroglyphs on nearby Chrome Island. After reading the original version of *My Ain Folk* by Winnifred Isbister, I am inclined to agree with John Millen’s critique, as he put it so diplomatically in his history of the Denman Island Pentlatch:

I’m not saying that Winnifred Isbister is mistaken in her account. In fact I think she accurately sets down the prevailing views and knowledge of the First Nations people that was held in her time among the descendents of the pioneer settlers.... Isbister’s understanding could simply be attributed to her lack of access, thirty years ago, to the early European records... But she also clearly reflects the attitudes of those times towards the First Nations. (p. 7)

Comox settlers Reginald Piddock and Harry Blaksley visited the village in 1862, three months after a devastating smallpox epidemic. There they observed large quantities of cedar trees set aside to be used in the making of canoes (Mackie, p. 47). In turn, Robert Brown, camped there in 1863, finding evidence of what he described as a “very extensive village.” He remarked with characteristic Eurocentric prudery, “It still retained traces of its former grandeur—pickets, carved images and massive hewn cedar frames. These carvings are all much of the same nature, some of them very obscene, their women and children being represented in *partis Naturalibes*” (Hayman, p. 108). By 1864, the Pentlatch had abandoned their village on Denman, and the twelve people still remaining after the smallpox epidemic had taken its toll, joined the K’ómoks or Qualicum bands. In 1870, only six remained, and when anthropologist Franz Boas visited Comox in 1886, there was only one family of Pentlatch speakers to be found (Mackie, pp. 48-49).

Pentlatch (an anglicized version of PÉntlatc) is the indigenous name of the Coast Salish group that inhabited Denman, speaking a language closely related to Comox and Sechelt (Boas, p. 237). According to *Minus Tides*, the Comox name for Denman Island is “Iháytayich” or Ká7Klit. Pentlatch sovereign territory formerly extended from Parksville to Kye Bay north of Comox until a combination of British gunboat diplomacy (like that practiced by Admiral Denman), and the intentional spread of smallpox by the arriving Europeans, opened Vancouver Island to coal mining interests

and arriving farmer/settlers like those from Orkney who found their way to nearby offshore islands like Denman.

As noted in a now deleted section from the first edition of *My Ain Folk* (1976) entitled “Denmans Were Famous People,” the namesake of the island Joseph Denman was Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Station Esquimalt from 1864-1867. According to Isbister, soon after taking command, Denman in his flagship HMS Sutelej, accompanied by HMS Devastation, visited Clayoquot Sound in October 1864 to “punish the Ahousat Indians for the murder of the crew and destruction of the trading sloop Kingfisher” (p.1). Isbister then moves on in the story of the famous Denman without exploring at all the volatile mix of trickery and violence that characterized colonial trade relations in the Clayoquot Sound and which were the context of this “murder” (Clayton, pp. 131-149). Instead, Isbister turns to Comox and the troublesome Eucletaw (Lekwiltok) Indians, who, being the most southerly of the Kwakiutl (now Kwakwaka'wakw), arrived in the valley from Camp Mudge for the herring and salmon fishing, camping on the Comox potato lands about two miles up the Courtenay River, which only recently had started to be farmed by white settlers (Isbister, p. 1). In essence, the tone of Isbister's version of Comox history hadn't changed much from the 1863 Vancouver Island journals of fellow Scotsman, Robert Brown.

While Brown was quick to decry the fact that “Comoucs” was originally an involuntarily bestowed name of derision applied to the tribe by the invading Eucletaws, he seems to have had no hesitation in himself labeling the Eucletaws as a band of thieves and drunkards who were “the terror of the coast.” He writes, in defense of the Comox, and in denigration of the Eucletaws, “In Victoria, we continually hear of the disorderly character of the Comoucs Indians, but they suffer the reputation of the Eucletaws” (Hayman, p. 123). What Isbister's account neglects to mention, however, is anything like Brown's telling observation about indigenous alienation from the land. Using a distinctly animalistic metaphor, Brown writes, almost as an aside,

Here as everywhere else the Indians are *growling* [italics mine] about payment for their land. The deer are fewer, and the berries are also, and I noticed them cutting down the crab apple trees to get easier to the fruit. They never would do that before, but now they think they may as well get as much out of their land as possible, as soon they will be altogether deprived of it. When traveling or sitting round the camp fire with them they always appeal to me on that subject, and I assure you that it is no easy matter to answer the question satisfactorily when an intelligent [Indian] looks up in your face and asks, “Had you no good land of your own that you come and deprive us of ours?” (Hayman, p. 124)

This is a good question, one that not all Europeans are willing to hear, much less contemplate.

Yet, Isbister paints a classic “good Indian/bad Indian” picture, with the good Indians helping the settlers harvest their potatoes and the bad Indians stealing them. As she puts it, with absolutely no sense of the way in which unceded territory might be viewed as stolen land by indigenous people, “they planned to steal the potatoes from the 70 scattered settlers, unlike the Comox tribe of Indians who had been friendly and helpful in harvesting the potatoes” (Isbister, p.1). Given this scenario, the reader is then prepared to accept the events that follow.

After arriving in Comox on the Sutej, Denman promptly placed Claylik, the principal chief of the Euclataws, in irons for 48 hours “in order to impress on the Indians the necessity of good behavior and the need to obtain permission to come to Comox for the salmon fishing” (Isbister, p. 2). Once again, Isbister misses the irony in expecting Native peoples to “obtain permission” to fish for the salmon which was so basic to their cultural as well as physical survival on what had been, prior to legalities imposed by the Crown, their land; as she also does with the Eucletaw’s obvious revulsion at wage slavery (Mackie, p. 148). The story ends with a chastened Claylik policing his own people after being appointed constable “to keep order among the Eucletaws, thus ending the trouble” (Isbister, p.2). In a telescoped sense, this story contains the history of Native-colonial relations in microcosm.

However, rather than framing this story in the usual one dimensional way, with either the heroic pioneer settlers or the evil pioneer invaders taking center stage, I would like to take a different tack by looking at the pre-Christian history of the Orkney Islands. In *My Ain Folk*, Orkney is frozen in time. It has no history before the Christianity brought by the settlers, but in fact Orkney islanders have a rich prehistoric (i.e. pre-writing) tribal ancestry. Though the Pentlatch eventually succumbed to smallpox, it is my hope that by demonstrating pre-Christian affinities between the indigenous peoples of Orkney and Denman, historical relationships will be revealed that are presently hidden by the civilized fetters of colonial thinking and by the unexamined notions of progress and racial superiority that so often cloud European thought, thus preventing both mutual understanding and self-discovery. What if, instead of seeing an unbridgeable chasm between themselves and the indigenous people they encountered, the Denman settlers had recognized, and appreciated their own pagan history in their experiences with Native peoples? Even Brown had pondered during his encampment at Village Point in relation to the totem poles he found there,

There are Pans and Driads—Gods of the woods and the groves, the running streams and the fountains. I have seen the women sitting for hours listening to the God of the Waterfalls! With all

their rudeness I wonder if our fore-fathers were one wit more civilized than these Indians . (Hayman, pp. 109-110)

### Passional Analogy: The Key to the “Hidden Harmony”

The analogies between Denman Island and Orkney which form the substance of this speculative history relate to shared tribal roots as evidenced by pagan avoidance of, or resistance to, Christian civilization, and the place of anarchism in the ongoing historical narratives of both islands. Just as my journey to Denman following an Orkney fiddle tune is a poetic one, so too are my flights of “passional analogy,” to use a term coined by utopian philosopher, Charles Fourier. As Penelope Rosemont put it in her 1999 book *Surrealist Experiences: 1001 Dawns, 221 Midnights*, taken from an article which quite serendipitously is called “The Coherence of Waves”:

The most haunting and decisive events of one’s life tend to cluster on the verge of the unknown, in that domain where the irrational mysteriously holds sway, a domain “unaccounted for” in existing forms and formulas, and which can be approached only by means of poetry and analogy. There is no intention here to draw conclusions, only to contribute to the illumination of the “hidden harmony” through which the Marvelous reveals itself. (p. 30)

Keeping Rosemont’s revelations in mind, the retelling of the history of Orkney and Denman that follows is predicated upon what surrealists call a “hidden harmony.”

In attempting to uncover the unknown correspondences between the histories of the two islands, the questions which I ask are not meant to elicit utilitarian answers but to create poetic metaphors and alchemically unleash audacious speculation. The principal founder of surrealism André Breton once explained such an approach as follows:

I never have experienced intellectual pleasure except on the analogical plane. For me the only *evidence* in the world is commanded by the spontaneous, extralucid, insolent rapport which establishes itself, under certain conditions, between one thing and another, and which common sense hesitates to confront... I madly love everything that adventurously breaks the thread of discursive thought and suddenly ignites a flare illuminating a life of relations fecund in another way... Nothing exists gratuitously... We stop and ask ourselves: “Where do we come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Primordial links are broken. Only analogical tools reach fleetingly towards their re-establishment revealing brief flashes from a lost mirror. The first duty of poets and artists is to re-establish analogy.” (pp. 280-2)

In keeping with the passional approach to analogy, in this piece I use the carnivalesque holiday of May Day as a touchstone for understanding what has been left out of Denman history. May Day not only has an ancient pagan lineage, but anarchist roots as well. The latter go BACK to the police riot at Haymarket Square in Chicago, Illinois which took place in 1886, just around the time of the settling of Denman by the Orkney pioneers. Then FORWARD to Stuart Christie and the dissidents who established Cienfuegos Press on the Orkney island of Sanday in the Seventies, not long after Canadian counter-cultural migrants and US draft dodgers had begun to arrive on Denman.

## PART I. Green Roots: The Pagan May Day

Today, in the US, May 1 is “officially” commemorated as “Law Day,” much to the disgruntlement of anarchists who associate that date with the Haymarket uprising against wage slavery, but even political radicals may be entirely unaware of the pagan roots of the holiday. As radical historian Peter Linebaugh has so poetically put it,

The origin of May Day is to be found in the Woodland Epoch of History. With the leafing of the trees in the Spring, people celebrated the fructifying spirit of vegetation, to use the phrase of J.G. Fraser, the anthropologist. The Druids had their oak worship. In Scotland, the herdsmen formed circles and danced around fires. The Celts lit bonfires on hilltops to honor their god Beltane. In Scandinavia fires were lit and the witches came out. Everywhere people ‘went a-Maying’ by going into the woods and bringing back leaf, bough and blossom to decorate their persons, homes, and loved ones with green garlands. Outside theater was performed with characters like “Jack-in-the Green” and the “Queen of the May.” Trees were planted. Maypoles were erected. Dances were danced. Music was played. Drinks were drunk, and love was made. Winter was over, spring had sprung. It was always a celebration of all that is free and life-giving in the world. That is the Green side of the May Day story. Whatever else it was, it was not a time to work.

And even today, these pagan rites have not been entirely lost in the fog of history.

Take the Green Man tradition of the “British Isles” that coincides with May Day. Picture if you will a Maypole on the village green with the Jack in the Green—a leaf clad mummer, encased in a wicker framework, who incarnates

the rites of Spring—escorted by an attendant Green Man amidst a throng of stick wielding morris dancers, as still happens every year in Hastings, England. Similarly, one can't miss the evidence of the persistence of the Old Religion even in the hallowed halls of the church where its pagan power is never fully co-opted. In the St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, we find the Green Man carved on the back of an ancient wooden chair and, in another part of the building, cut into a pillar, where he is surrounded by greenery and accompanied by lizard consorts. It is Kirkwall, by the way, which many longtime Denman residents claim as the place from whence the original Denman settlers came.

As a disgorging of vegetation, the Green Man's mouth is not filled with pious words, but with leaves, reminding us of our pre-Christian oneness with nature. And, of course, who is the legendary Robin Hood himself but a latter day incarnation of the Green Man? As William Anderson and Clive Hicks conceptualize it,

He offers a vision of a dangerous but, at the same time, carefree life of which the sweating plowman and the overworked apprentice could at least dream. As Robin of the Wood, he also appealed to atavistic instincts, the inner certainty that the woods were wakeful and alive. He is the watcher through the leaves, the burst of laughter in the empty clearing, the joker in the ambush. (p. 29)

Driven to the greenwood by the forces of law and order, Robin is an outlaw from civilization.

## Pagan Orkney

In an attempt to understand the so-called pagan roots of May Day, pre-Christian Orkney is an excellent place for us to begin. For at least 6,000 years people have lived on the Orkney Islands. Orkney's prehistoric brochs (stone refuges), standing stones (like the Ring o' Brodgar), and Neolithic settlements (like Skara Brae) are evidence of an ancient past that cannot be ignored by even the most casual visitor.

As recently as 1958, a major find was made on the island of South Ronaldsay; involving the family name of the author of the original edition of *My Ain Folk*. I refer to the Isbister Tomb of the Eagles, a chambered cairn which dates back to 3,000 BC, during Neolithic times. Many speculate that Orkney's chambered tombs were not merely repositories for the dead but were actually used throughout the year for ancestral ceremonial purposes. In the case of the Tomb of the Eagles, speculation has it that the sea eagle might have been a totem animal, which symbolized the tribe and was connected to the rituals undertaken in and around the tomb. As Sigurd Towrie notes,

At Isbister, like Orkney's other chambered cairns, the bones of the deceased were brought in and stored in communal groups—a fact that indicates the flesh was removed from the corpses before they were interred. Were the sea eagles somehow connected to the removal process? Tearing the flesh from a laid out body were the feeding birds seen as carrying the soul or spirit of the dead to the otherworld and perhaps seen as mythical protectors, interred with the ancestors to guard them in the afterlife. (p. 1)

Many talons and claws of sea eagles have been found among the burials. In any case, as Jean-Pierre Mohen has put it in talking about the tombs of megalith-building societies like that which populated Orkney, “The collective nature of the tombs tends to suggest a form of primitive communism” (p. 64). Perhaps anarchy might be an even better term.

Evidence suggests that the dieties of the old pantheon did not abruptly die out when Christianity arrived on the scene. Until 1814, when it was destroyed by a farmer, the Odin Stone, a holed stone located at Croft Odin, Orkney, was used for oath-taking. As late as 1791, there are records of a young man being arraigned by the Elders of Orkney for “breaking the promise to Odin,” an oath sworn on this stone. When visiting the stone, an offering of bread, cheese, a piece of cloth, or small stone was customary. An 1823 woodcut of standing stones in Orkney shows the Ring of Stenness, known as the Temple of the Moon, with a scene of a woman invoking Odin to hallow her betrothal promise (Jones and Pennick, p. 160). In 1703, Martin Martin wrote of the Orkney stone circles at Stenness and Brodgar as locations “believed to have been Places design’d to offer Sacrifice in time of Pagan Idolatry, and for this reason the people called them the Ancient Temples of the Gods” (Jones and Pennick, p. 209).

In order to understand Orkney's connection to Denman's earliest settlers, we need to more fully comprehend its ethnic history. Though theoretically Orkney is part of Scotland, Orcadians have not forgotten their tribal past or their more recent Scandinavian ancestry, which dates back to the first Norse settlement in the ninth century. To this day, ask any Orcadian if s/he is a Scot, and the answer you receive will often be a firmly autonomous, “No!” Orkney never operated under the clan system, and the tartans and bagpipes so emblematic of the Scottish highlands were absent in Orcadian culture. In following that Orkney fiddle tune mentioned earlier, I discovered that while many Orkney melodies are clearly of Scottish origin, others exhibit traits belonging to the neighboring northern climes of Shetland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Strictly speaking, the reason that the use of the term “Orkneys” when describing the islands grates on the ear of the Orcadian is that the name is already plural as “Orkney” is simply a shortened version of



the Old Norse “Orkneyjar,” meaning Seal Islands. In fact, Gaelic was never spoken on Orkney. It was Old Norse and its variants which replaced the earlier Pictish language before it too was replaced by Scots, but, of course, with a distinct Orcadian dialect owing much to the language called Norn, which was an adaptation of the Old Norse.

This study of language beckons us to delve further back into Orkney’s Pictish history. Who were the Picts? Much of what is today Scotland was once Pictland. According to historian Stewart Ross, “Of all the major tribal groupings within Scotland, it is the Picts who provide the clearest continuity between prehistoric and early medieval times” (Ross, p. 120). The aforementioned Isbister eagle totem tangibly speaks to the persistence of a Pictish past since individual symbols in Pictish art date back to prehistoric times and the ancient tradition of rock art, where animal symbols might very well have been representations of tribal names. In fact, the Picts were among the last pagan peoples of Scotland to accept Christianity, and in Northern areas like Orkney, pagan burial customs remained in practice until the eighth century.

From the fourth century onwards, the Picts were in essence a federation of tribes (particularly the Caledonians and Maetae). While proponents of civilization are often loath to associate their ancestry with nomadic primitives, according to anarchist thinker John Zerzan, formerly nomadic peoples found themselves at a disruptive turning point in human history during the transition to the Neolithic. As Zerzan sees it, the change from hunter-gatherer to the settled agricultural way of life was based on the domination of nature which has as its civilized legacy the miseries of production, private property, work, governmental tyranny, and abstraction from the natural world through the mediating concepts of time, written language, and institutionalized religion. Yet, as Ross maintains, Pictish hunter-gatherers no doubt survived in remoter areas of Scotland, which almost certainly included Orkney, some perhaps unconsciously choosing to either refuse the alienation of Neolithic domestication outright or to modify its scope as best they could. The Old Ways did not die out completely.

Like the Native peoples who once inhabited Denman, the prehistoric hunter-gatherers, who populated what is now known as Scotland, were essentially nomadic. However, it is speculated that they most likely established more permanent bases in those areas within their territory where there was plentiful fresh water close to the sea and its shellfish repositories on shore before setting off inland in pursuit of deer herds in the Spring or edible fruits, berries, and plants which could easily be plucked from the countryside in warmer weather. Huge middens are the most striking feature of these early Scottish settlements.

The meaning of the Latinized word “Picti” is roughly, “the picture people,” or “the painted people.” This, of course, refers to the custom of painting or

tattooing designs on the skin. Though such body modification was also associated with the Celts, the extent to which the Picts were a Celtic people has been much disputed. The Celts only made their way into what is now Scotland from the fifth or sixth century BC onwards and then merged with the Pictish kings through intermarriage as a result of matrilineal descent at the upper echelons of society. Beyond this standard historical account, other more heterodox historians, like David MacRitchie, have speculated on the hidden history of the African presence in the British Isles, postulating that the Picts, unlike the Celts, may not even have fit the racial classification of “white.” As MacRitchie sees it, they were “Moors,” that is “black,” like those nomadic “early Scots” who were often referred to as “Egyptians” or “gypsies” (MacRitchie, 1985 and 1991).

In any case, by the sixth century AD, indigenous Pictish traditions had combined with Celtic ones to produce a new cultural amalgam which was in evidence by the time of the first Viking raid in 793 AD and the later ascension of Kenneth MacAlpin of Dalriada as king of a united Scottish and Pictish kingdom in the mid-ninth century. As neopagan writer Starhawk explains, “In the British Isles the victorious Celts adopted many features of the Old Religion incorporating them into the Druidic mysteries” (pp. 28-9).

While, like Zerzan, Starhawk considers herself an anarchist (and both were actively involved in the Seattle events that confronted the WTO in 1999), they apparently differ on the degree to which a spiritual embrace of the Goddess can restore us to an anarchic state. As Zerzan has written, “Some of the major Neolithic religions often attempted a symbolic healing of the agricultural rupture with nature through the mythology of the earth mother, which needless to say does nothing to restore the lost unity” (p 77). On the other hand, Starhawk looks more positively at the preservers of the Old Religion and the Goddess tradition, seeing them as resisters to the new Warrior Gods of domination who attempted to subjugate those she calls “the Picts or Pixies, the Fairyfolk or Faeries” (p. 28). So, with that in mind, let us turn our attention to the Faeries and the persecution of the witches.

To further this discussion, let’s examine the case of one Jonet Drever of Orkney. In the seventeenth century, she, among others, was convicted and found guilty of witchcraft on Orkney. While other Orcadian women were accused of being “sea witches,” “storm witches,” or “weather witches,” her crime was “consorting with the fairyfolk” (Murray, p. 49). Unlike others accused of witchcraft, she escaped with her life, but her sentence was, “To be scourged from the end of said town to the other. And thereafter to be banished to the country. And never to return under pain of death” (Murray, p. 49). Keep in mind as well that these faeries in question were not only the keepers of the Old Religion, but pastoral herders of cattle—not nomadic, but not settled farm folk—and so, from the Christian settlers’ point of view, they

constituted a double threat to civilization. Of course, the Picts were eventually overwhelmed by the onslaught of the Neolithic Revolution. Yet, even as they began to establish primitive agricultural settlements of circular houses and their attendant fields or else were absorbed into the village (perhaps as was the case with the ancestors of Jonet Drever), the memory of a tribal past and the flame of the Old Religion was never entirely extinguished on Orkney. Nor, even today, on Denman.

Since May Day is not only a pagan holiday, but an anarchist one, the relationship between the holocaust visited upon practitioners of witchcraft and the more contemporary attack on anarchists, is worth exploring here. As twentieth century writer Nigel Pennick, who was quoted earlier in reference to the standing stones of Orkney, has stated,

Paranoia is not only a trait of the present order of history. The authorities, whether military, spiritual or academic, are ever fearful of their overthrow, and consequently are always on the lookout for plots, real or imaginary. Whatever the underlying causes of the witchcraft mania, the reaction of the church and secular authorities against these unfortunates has a remarkable parallel in modern times with the hysteria over “terrorists.” (p. 86)

Interestingly, the above piece appeared in *Anarchist Review*, a periodical which we will hear more about in the next section of this essay in that it was published by Stuart Christie, himself the victim of a latter day witch hunt, who escaped to the very Orkney islands, where centuries earlier Jonet Drever had stood accused of consorting with Faeries.

## PART 2: Explosive Roots: The Anarchist May Day

Returning to Peter Linebaugh’s classic capsule history of May Day, we must now elaborate upon the holiday’s anarchist roots that can be traced back to Haymarket Square in 1886. By this time, the struggle against wage slavery was in full force; the commons had long been enclosed and the agricultural revolution was entering the machine age. As Linebaugh reconstructs the events,

The land was mechanized, Chicago was the jugular vein. Cyrus McCormick wielded the surgeon’s knife. His mechanical reapers harvested the grasses and grains. Not that McCormick actually made reapers, members of Molder’s Union Local 23 did that, and on May Day 1867 they went on strike, starting the Eight-Hour Movement. In May 1886, four molders whom McCormick locked-out were shot dead by the police. Thus, did the “grim reaper” maintain his profits. On May 4, 1886, several thousand people gathered near Haymarket Square to hear about the shootings at the McCormick works. At 10:30 PM, 176 policemen charged

the crowd that had dwindled to about 200. An unknown hand threw a stick of dynamite. All hell broke loose, many were killed, and the rest is history. Eight men were railroaded in Chicago at a farcical trial.

Since many imprisoned were anarchists, it was, in effect, Anarchy itself that was on trial, and on November 11, 1887, four men were hanged, essentially for conspiring to overthrow the government. Another had already taken his own life in his prison cell rather than give that privilege to the State.

### Anarchist Orkney

One might say Orkney's relationship to Haymarket is likewise explosive. To this day no one knows who really threw the dynamite at Haymarket Square. It might even have been a police agent provocateur planted in the crowd that did the deed, hoping to justify a police crackdown by playing on the stereotype of the anarchist bomber. Even though in reality not all anarchists advocate, engage in, or even condone the use of violence in the context of direct action, the popular association of anarchism with violence against people endures. One thing we do know with certainty about that 1886 Chicago May Day gathering is that none of the Haymarket Eight who were the speakers on the platform that day tossed the dynamite, since they were in plain view of everyone at all times.

There is no mystery, either, about the details of a failed 1964 plot to assassinate the Spanish fascist dictator, General Franco, through the use of plastic explosives. This, strangely enough, is the beginning of a story which spans many years and ends with Conservative party members of the British parliament exploding with anger over what they termed "a hotbed of Anarchy in the Orkneys" and with Orkney ultimately portrayed in the media as "Terror Island."

In more personalized terms, this is the life story of Stuart Christie of Glasgow, who at the tender age of 18 entered the pages of anarchist history in a kilt. The kilt came in handy, he has said, because it was easier for a Scottish hitchhiker in France to get a lift than an Englishman, as Scots were more popular there than the English. As he put it in his autobiography *The Christie File*,

The French entertain a certain admiration for kilted Scots—possibly because the Scots have made war on most of their kings and put so many of them to death. The only benefit the Scots ever derived from their kings was when they sold Charles I to the English, [but] the bottom has fallen out of this sort of market—you couldn't give the present bunch away. (pp. 33 and 235)

Hitchhiking successfully through France, Christie stayed a week in Paris. There, he picked up the plastic and detonators meant to be couriered to anarchists in the Spanish anti-fascist resistance for a plotted attentat against Franco. It had, of course, been Franco (with the help of Hitler and later Stalin) who had crushed the anarchist revolution going on in Spain during what is often erroneously referred to as the Spanish Civil War. Christie proceeded to hitchhike into Spain with the explosives, at first strapped to his chest, and then packed away tightly in the sleeping bag in his rucksack. However, he was caught at a rendezvous for the transfer of the explosives to a contact in Madrid, and was charged (no pun originally intended) with “banditry and terrorism.” They confiscated his rucksack, including his kilt.

Eventually, he was released and returned to London after serving three and a half years of a 20 year sentence, but the British Special Branch was convinced that he would introduce a continental variety of domestic terrorism upon his return to England. He became the object of continuing investigation, harassment, and constant surveillance. The press in turn labeled him “Britain’s leading self-confessed anarchist,” and he, for his part, made no bones about being an anarchist. He played a key role in organizing the international Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) to aid libertarian political prisoners, became an editor of the activist-oriented anarchist/class struggle periodical *Black Flag* (which had formerly been the *Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross* until 1970), and went on to co-author *The Floodgates of Anarchy* with Albert Meltzer, long-time British anarchist and fellow editor of *Black Flag*. While none of the above activities were violent ones, he continued to contend with constant police scrutiny. In 1980 at age 34, Christie expressed his views on the strategic uses of revolutionary violence in the movement in an interview for the American anarchist publication *Soil of Liberty*, conducted on the Orkney islands. As he put it, “Obviously you don’t want to use violence when it’s counter-productive. In this current situation at the moment, it would be silly to go out and shoot Margaret Thatcher. It would not be so silly to go out and pie her” (Patten, pp. 60-61).

Christie’s road to Orkney, in a sense, began with his arrest on what amounted to conspiracy charges at the height of the social unrest that characterized the late Sixties. In 1971, he was tried for his supposed involvement as the ringleader of an English urban guerrilla group who called themselves The Angry Brigade. Their name roughly combined the name of the Spanish anarchist Durruti Brigade and the French situationist group, the Enragés, who had just recently participated as human “detonators” in a series of street actions, strikes, acts of sabotage, and occupations which occurred in Paris around May Day of 1968 and almost succeeded in toppling president Charles De Gaulle by sparking popular insurrections in the workplace, the university, and the streets. The Angry Brigade for its part carried out a number of “pro-

paganda by deed” bombings in Britain against the property of governmental and corporate institutions. Since not all British anarchists agreed with these tactics, they provoked heated debate within anti-authoritarian circles. As Albert Meltzer has noted in relation to the Angry Brigade in his autobiography, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels*, “Though the press used the word ‘terrorism,’ not a single life was lost nor a single person harmed in these explosions” (Meltzer, p. 236). Nor were there hijackings or hostage taking of innocent bystanders. As they stated their own case in Angry Brigade *Communique* #5, “We are no mercenaries. We attack property not people.”

Christie’s “crime” here seems to have been guilt by association in that *Black Flag* under his editorship repeatedly refused, even under police pressure, to publicly denounce the Angry Brigade, and the paper readily printed their communiqués which explained their actions in their own words. Moreover, Christie was linked to the Angry Brigade in the eyes of the police because of his involvement with the First of May Group, which was part of the continuing anarchist resistance against Franco. In turn, that group had ties to the International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement on the continent with which the Angry Brigade itself was associated. As a final justification for targeting him, his police interrogator accusingly explained to Christie for the disposition record, “You have publicly admitted to being a member of the anarchist movement.” Not surprisingly, as had previously been true with Haymarket in the nineteenth century and is currently the case with the anarchist wing of the global justice movement in this one, anarchy itself was once again being “criminalized” in the second half of the twentieth century.

Though the Angry Brigade opposed vanguardism, had no mastermind calling the shots, and was decidedly leaderless in keeping with its anarchist principles, Christie was singled out by the police as their headman nevertheless. As he described the situation in his autobiography, “The frightened governors of the nation demanded that the police ‘find the leaders.’ But there was no leader to find” (Christie, p. 242). As far as the police were concerned, someone needed to take the fall, and Christie was their candidate, but the trumped up charges didn’t stick, and the jury concurred with his defense that detonators had been planted on him by the cops. After a year and a half in prison without bail while awaiting trial, he was acquitted of all charges leveled against him, and upon his release, he resumed his political activities. Yet, though exonerated by a court of law, the police verbally warned him, “We are going to get you next time.” This threat strongly suggested a future frame-up was in the offing. It was time to leave London, but because of his notoriety, the doors of every country in the “Free World” were closed against him. Christie began a brief post-1975 acquittal stint in the pleasant Yorkshire village of Honley, near Huddersfield, England, putting out *Black*

*Flag* and establishing his fledgling anarchist publishing house, Cienfuegos Press—which was launched in 1974 amidst constant police harassment.

Even Canada got the Christie jitters during this time. As the story goes, Christie was approached by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to do a television interview, and he, somewhat reluctantly, accepted. But two days before he was to fly out to Canada, he received a phone call from the CBC reporter in London to announce that the interview had been cancelled. As Christie pithily explains it,

CBC representatives were informed that the immigration authorities had been instructed to turn me away if I turned up at any international port in Canada. This was hard to swallow. The only police record I had was that of a fascist military court martial. When the Canadian authorities discovered that this, in fact, was the case, and they had no legal leg to stand on, they decided to take another tack. This time it went straight to the Canadian Cabinet, who passed emergency legislation to the effect that immigration officials were empowered to refuse entry to anyone they considered to be an “enemy of the state.” Well, we always said the state was the enemy of the people. I later received confirmation of the cabinet decision from the woman at CBC. She added that they had made a gracious rider to the effect that they would reconsider my case after the Olympic Games. It struck me later that perhaps they thought I might run off with the gold medals. Needless to say, the legislation became a permanent feature of Canadian law. (pp. 352-3)

At this point in his life, faced with repressive policing measures at home and abroad, he moved with his wife, Brenda, to Sanday, the largest of the North Isles of Orkney, about 15 miles northeast of Kirkwall, in 1976. Sanday had no police force, there was lots of storage space for the growing Cienfuegos archives, and, by a strange coincidence, Colin Ward, the publisher of *Anarchy* magazine in the UK, had once been stationed on Orkney as a young soldier. Yet, Orkney seemed impossibly remote to many of his former urban anarchist comrades, and as Albert Meltzer wryly embellishes upon Christie’s own account,

Joe Thomas jokingly asked me if Stuart had advance information that all dissidents would be banished to a Gulag in the Orkneys and he had made sure of getting the best housing going there. There were some [subscribers to *Black Flag*], especially from the USA, who queried with me if they could safely write the address—Over the Water, Sanday. I invariably explained that the Orkney



Islands had been civilized long enough to have a postal service and cannibalism had practically died out.

(Christie, p. 356, Meltzer, pp. 268 and 286)

In 2004, homing in on the official tourism website for Orkney, the following tourist promotion babble appeared: “You may gather your own thoughts and impressions in one of the island bars among the friendly and interested local folk.” Though times have undoubtedly changed since Christie’s arrival, he remembers his initial decision to move to Sanday like this:

What probably sprung it for me was the fact that that evening in the local hotel I asked for a Glenmorangie malt whiskey, my favourite tippie, and was surprised to see the barman fill the glass to the brim. Not only that, but he charged me the same price as a normal whiskey. I didn’t say anything about it, downed it quickly and went back for more. The same thing happened again, in fact it went on the rest of the night.

(Christie, p. 356)

There is nothing, of course, on the Sanday visitor website about Stuart Christie or Cienfuegos Press.

Soon after this pleasantly disconcerting experience, the Sanday Island outpost was chosen to be the new home of the now legendary Cienfuegos Press. Cienfuegos has been widely acknowledged as the historical predecessor of today’s AK Press for its role in making available English language anarchist publications to a wider reading public. The namesake for the operation was Camillo Cienfuegos, the libertarian Cuban revolutionary murdered by Fidel’s brother, Raul Castro, as were many other anarchists and libertarian socialists who opposed the growing power of the Cuban Communist Party after that island’s revolution.

During its Orkney years, which lasted until 1982, Cienfuegos published in book and pamphlet form a wide variety of anarchist classics by authors such as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Luigi Galleani, Rudolph Rocker, Michael Bakunin, Ricardo Flores Magon, Charlotte Wilson, and Gregory Maxinoff, as well as works by more contemporary writers like Noam Chomsky, Albert Meltzer, Harold Barclay, and Christie himself. In addition, Orkney was the home of the *Anarchist Review*, edited by Christie, which John Patten in his introduction to *Islands of Anarchy* calls Cienfuegos’s “greatest achievement” (Patten, p IX) in that its six issues brought together intellectuals and students of anarchism with activists in an ongoing dialogue on anarchist history, theory, and tactics. Its last issue included an article by John Zerzan, who coincidentally, was present at Denman’s first Anarchist Gathering in 2002 held on the weekend that I originally arrived on the island to take up residence—yet another

Orkney-Denman connection enmeshed in that renewed acquaintance. As Patten sees *Anarchist Review's* importance, its pages represent "the collective memory of the anarchist movement of the time" (Patten, p. IX).

However, after a series of economic disasters, which included the destruction of a cache of recently printed *Anarchist Reviews* due to a truck fire en route to the island, and a printer who refused to compensate them for the loss of an expensive made-to-order reproduction of a work on Japanese anarchism, Cienfuegos found itself on even shakier financial ground than usual. To top it all off, Brenda was arrested while visiting Stuart's family in Germany in 1981. She was accused of having been involved in a First of May Group attack 10 years previously with the allegation that she was currently associated with the German resistance (though she had never been to Germany before). Stuart spent a small fortune on legal costs and telephoning all around the world to muster support and solidarity. The charges were finally dismissed after an international protest campaign, but the monetary outlay proved to be the final straw that pushed the Christies into leaving Orkney after the Bank of Scotland foreclosed on their house.

Before he left Sanday, Christie's final instance of cold war media notoriety came with the 1980 publication of *Towards A Citizens' Militia: Anarchist Alternatives To NATO and The Warsaw Pact*, released in conjunction with the International Revolutionary Solidarity Movement and the First of May Group. One of Cienfuegos most popular books, it read in part:

The thought of war and oppression is unpleasant to decent people the world over, both East and West. Yet, if you want to survive the worst with dignity then you must be [at] least [able to] imagine the very worst. Suppose the Russians or—heaven forbid!—a cabal of army and police officers took power tomorrow at 4:00 AM? Having lived for centuries in a society rooted in obedience to authority we can assume that by midday there would be people clapping them in the streets... by three we'd have citizens loading other citizens on to three ton lorries... on the nine o'clock news there'd be a well-known personality oozing assurances that it is all for the best and it is our constitutional duty to accept the new order... and by 10:30 the following morning we'd have respected members of the bench setting the seal of legality on the authority of the new regime and packing the opposition off to the uranium mines in Orkney, or to Wembley Stadium to await whatever authoritarian delights lay in store for them. (Patten, p. 25)

The information that made up the volume was largely taken from already existing Swiss Home Guard manuals on civilian resistance. Predictably though, the press and politicians went ballistic. The far right philosopher

Roger Scruton alleged in the *Times* that Christie had written *The Anarchist Cookbook*. Aside from the fact that Christie had not written either book, the Cienfuegos publication was a serious work and not at all like the laughable parody of anarchism that is known as *The Anarchist Cookbook* (as is also true for the recent movie by the same name). It seems that the idea of a defense alternative costing nothing, unlikely to be used for aggressive purposes, and widely available to the public was, as Albert Meltzer put it, “anathema to those who were spending 13 billion pounds allegedly for the same job and risking the existence of the world in doing so” (p. 270).

That Orkney wasn’t as remote as might seem from atomic age international politricks was alluded to in the book’s sarcastic mention of the uranium mines. In fact, during his stay on Sanday, Christie, along with many other Orcadians, actively resisted uranium mining on the islands. As a publisher, he started up the *Free Winged Eagle* as an alternative to the conservative *Orcadian*, and the newspaper’s firm stand against the planned uranium mining received widespread support on Sanday. As Christie explained such a turn of events in 1980,

This is an island community and the inhabitants are surely opposed to mining uranium. It would be different on the mainland. There is less of a sense of community. But here, Orkney begins at the pier. Anybody coming in would require some degree of cooperation from local inhabitants. If they don’t have that cooperation, and have active antagonism, a lot of people have threatened direct action. (Patten, p. 60)

In the end, the government was forced to shelve the project, amidst a sea of No Uranium stickers which dotted the island. Not content to limit his community activism to the newspaper, when Christie decided to republish a long out of print volume by Reverend Alexander Goodfellow called *A Visit To The Island of Sanday* (first published in 1912 as *A Church History of Sanday*), he made sure to insert a new 1978 introduction which addressed contemporary political problems, such as the uranium issue, facing Orkney in particular and Scotland in general.

Actually, Christie’s intuitively anarchist response to governmental interference was not so different than that of other Sanday islanders. As he recounts,

On Friday we may get a phone call from “a friend” to say the police are coming out to the island on their occasional three monthly or so visit to maintain law and order. The grapevine has it that they are only here for one night and don’t intend to make a long weekend of it. Police are superfluous here. The only crime on the island is the occasional bald tyre. However, every time

the police arrive, the whole island is thrown into a state of chaos and disruption. Their only justification for being here is to check on road tax, licenses, lights, and depth of tyre tread. Trade and industry grind to a standstill. Honest upright citizens are afraid to leave the safety of their homes unless it is an emergency or they believe their cars to be beyond criticism. (Christie, p. 359)

This humorous story of everyday islander resistance to the authority of government sounds very familiar to my Denman ears.

## CODA

Christie ends his autobiography as I started this article, with an Orkney fiddle tune, recalling a trip he once made to the local pub where a “sing-song” was in progress with an accordionist and a fiddler holding forth. Though Cienfuegos Press had already left the islands shortly before my own visit to Orkney, I can’t help but wonder if one of the tunes in the Sanday pub that night was “Dancing Waves.”

In closing, then, I would like to dedicate this article to the Lord of Misrule who often appears in the trickster’s guise of analogy to upset all settled ideas, sweeping us off our feet like a gay fiddle tune.

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—William Crook, Jr.



# Utopia at Your Doorstep: Vachel Lindsay's *Golden Book of Springfield*

To the cornerstones of the town; to the newspaper and motion picture and stage censors; to the respectables, the lady bountifuls, the so-called senior families, to the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution; to the Sons and Daughters of the Ancient Democrats, and the Sons and Daughters of the Ancient Republicans; and in general, to the dragon-quack worm of respectability that dieth not. On the central pedestal is a dragon with a duck's head. On the top of the other pedestals are the stone images of a fretful ape, an enormous frog, a long-nosed ant eater, a laughing idiot, a hawk, a goat, a three-legged bull dog wearing a plug hat, a chicken without feathers, and a hog wearing trousers.

—Vachel Lindsay,  
ranting about the Establishment in  
*The Golden Book of Springfield*, 1920.

Our age is an age of compromises, of half-measures, of the lesser evil. Visionaries are derided or despised, and 'practical men' rule our lives. Utopias have often been plans of societies functioning mechanically, dead structures conceived by economists, politicians and moralists; but they have also been the living dreams of poets.

—Marie-Louise Berneri,  
*Journey Through Utopia*, 1950.

## An Historical Note to the Reader

**D**uring my teaching sojourn in Springfield, Illinois, I became attracted to the more dissident writings of the poet Vachel Lindsay by way of his utopian novel, *The Golden Book of Springfield*. In fact, this was an unusual place to start with Lindsay, since most people familiar with his poetry have never read or even heard of the book, and Lindsay scholars typically dismiss it as unreadable. While

certainly it is seriously flawed as a novel, I found it to be an exhilarating flight of fancy through a visionary poet's reimagined cityscape alive with festivity at every turn. Though I was often frustrated by the naiveté of Lindsay's politics, I was in turn fascinated by his utopian reveries. I offer this essay then as a tribute to the Prairie Troubadour who encouraged me to envision the colossal dullness of Springfield bathed in a utopian light—no longer a routine state capital but a place of destiny!

## The Doorstep as Utopian Metaphor

The doorstep is at once solid and fluid. It is solid in that it sits securely on the foundation that permanently anchors the house. Yet it occupies a liminal space. It welcomes the world inside or bars it from entry, and likewise, it serves as a gateway to the outside world beyond the house. If one takes that first step outside, a vast horizon opens up that holds the promise of a potential journey that might begin with the local village and end with the global village. If one chooses to leave, one might never return or one could carve a homeward path by stopping anywhere along the way, returning in linear or circular fashion with whatever wisdom one has gained in the course of one's adventure.

Vachel Lindsay—in both his writings and his life—in turn romanticized the settled Midwestern village and the open road. He endeavored over and over again to move his natal town of Springfield, Illinois closer to his utopian ideals. Yet periodically, he was a hobohemian wanderer who traveled the American byways searching for Aladdin's lamp and trading his rhymes for bread and board. Always, he returned with new ideas and images and began to reimagine Springfield as a tentative utopia in process rather than accepting it as a Babbitt's paradise. For Lindsay, Springfield was a metaphor for America. If he could play a part in propelling Springfield, which was to him the quintessential American Town, in a more utopian direction, there was still hope for America. To Lindsay, utopia was a vision glimpsed both while following the thistle-down on his nomadic wanderings on that golden “nowhere” of the road while preaching the Gospel of Beauty and also in the imagining of a city that in his words is “not builded in a day” (*Poetry*, p. 168).

As he saw it, the secular utopian project is at best incomplete, unfinished, and in a constant state of flux until the Millennium. The utopian imagination cannot be confined by mainstream common sense or be

subsumed by politics, no matter how progressive. In the words of surrealist theorist André Breton,

Poets and artists in particular would be inexcusable if they tried to guard against utopia, when the very nature of their creation leads them to draw, at least initially, from the vague realm, where utopia reigns. In some instances, this utopia might prove fruitful in reality, thereby revealing itself as having been not such a utopia at all. (p. 217)

For Lindsay, the immediate question to be asked is, “What do we do in the meantime?” We must not just sit around and wait for the Millennium. Instead, we should try to push things in a more utopian direction. Like the tramping Lindsay, utopia never stands still. It yearns for the open road of vision quests. It speaks the magical language of poetic desire in the shimmering voice of unbridled possibility.

Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch alludes to utopia’s peripatetic subversiveness in his term, “anticipatory illumination.” In Bloch’s sense, the true function of traversing the utopian “wish landscape” and formulating the “poetically precise dream” is to reveal what is concealed by that which exists, shining a poet’s light on the “not yet conscious,” rather than illuminating the more familiar pathways (Bloch, pp. 71-77 and 161, and Daniel and Moylan, pp. 47, 85). Lindsay’s own contemporary Gustav Landauer, German libertarian socialist/anarchist philosopher, saw utopian idealism as involving a process of becoming in which the utopian ideal, even if only seen as a glimmer in the distance, can be an impetus for action. As he put it,

The ideal does not become reality, but our reality is realized in our time through the ideal. We envisage something beyond which we see no better possibility. We perceive the ultimate and say: That is what I want!—and then we do everything to achieve it. (p. 30)

Landauer almost certainly would have recognized Lindsay as what the former called a visionary “poet of folk consciousness” who sought to awaken a utopian longing in his fellow citizens by attempting to place “the ideal” in the foreground of popular consciousness.

As Lindsay repeatedly demonstrated in his own life, one road open to the wandering utopian is to return to the hearth, find other kindred spirits, and test the strength of his/her poetic dreams in the crucible of the local. As a “laughing poet,” Lindsay fought a lifelong “soul battle” with Springfield respectability and its guardians at the State House and on Main

Street. In 1920, he issued his only novel, *The Golden Book of Springfield*. Set in the Mystic Year of 2018, it was his jubilee trumpet call for utopia.

In his earlier 1915 book *The Art of the Moving Picture*, Lindsay hailed the advent of film as both a potentially democratic art form and as a spiritual medium for prophecy. In one of its many fascinating tangents, he briefly evaluated *Looking Backward* (1888). Lindsay saw Bellamy's "Nationalism" as a threat to individual creativity, and he was especially disappointed that the book lacked the kind of religious fervor that appealed to him. Calling for "more mystical and less mechanical successors," he was further provoked to chide Bellamy for having "reduced the world to a matter of pressing the button, turning on the phonograph. It was a combination of glorified department store and Coney Island, on a cooperative basis" (*Prose*, pp. 215 and 233). Nevertheless, Lindsay was not totally dismissive of the prophetic power of Bellamy's vision. He considered both Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and the later *Equality* (1897)—which posits a key distinction between equality and uniformity—along with William Dean Howell's *Traveler From Altruria* (1894)—as "ancient types of American prophecy." These he duly noted in his second volume of film criticism *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies*, posthumously published around the turn of the twentieth century (p. 297).

In fact, *Equality* offers us a previously unexplored link between Bellamy and Lindsay as utopian novelists who, though they had significant differences, both were not far from the orbit of Kropotkin's anarchism in certain ways. Bellamy once said of the utopia of *Equality* that it was "almost anarchy." Kropotkin in praising the book said, "I know of no other Socialist work on the subject that equals Bellamy's *Equality*" (Patai, pp.180-191). In explaining Lindsay's "walled city" of Springfield, Illinois in the year 2018, Lindsay scholars typically point to Ralph Cram's politically conservative book, *Walled Towns* (1919). Lindsay carefully read Cram's volume and marked it with his own comments in the margins of his personal copy. However, Cram's book owes an unacknowledged debt to Kropotkin's earlier (1902) book *Mutual Aid*, which offers an anarchist analysis of the walled medieval city.

In Kropotkin's classic volume, the city walls are not only seen as safeguarding the peace against unwanted foreign invasions, but as the protective framework for the development of individual liberty and mutual aid. Kropotkin's model of the walled city divided into several sections radiating from a center, with each section roughly corresponding to a particular guild, precisely mirrors Lindsay's star pattern spatial design for the beloved "mother city" of Springfield in the year 2018, complete with bell towers. In this sense,

Kropotkin's self-administered and federated model of the free city was an idea which Lindsay later sketched out in *The Golden Book*, bathing the novel in what I would call a "futuristic medievalism." There is no historical evidence about whether Lindsay did or did not read *Mutual Aid* itself, though he might indeed have found Kropotkin's work congenial in many ways.

For Kropotkin, like Lindsay, there is an intrinsic link between the medieval walled city and utopia. As Kropotkin put it,

Not only were many aspirations of modern radicals already realized in the middle ages, but much of what is described now as Utopian was accepted then as a matter of fact. . . . The medieval city was an attempt at organizing, on a much grander scale than in a village community, a close union for mutual aid and support, for consumption and production, and for social life altogether, without imposing upon men the fetters of the State, but giving full liberty of expression to the creative genius of each separate group of individuals in art, crafts, science, commerce, and political organization. (pp.194-195 and 186)

Contrary to conventional wisdom about the rise of the "city-state," for Kropotkin, the anarchist impulse toward mutual aid was nurtured by the medieval city. Instead of being simply an earlier version of the capitalist state, to Kropotkin, and to Lindsay, the medieval city, heralded the utopian possibilities at our doorstep.

## Beyond Babbitry

Central to *The Golden Book's* utopian nature was Lindsay's long-standing rejection of the avaricious materialism that characterized the Springfield of his day. As Lindsay had once put it in his self-published and distributed *War Bulletin* #3 (1909):

Let us enter the great offices and shut the desk lids and cut the telephone wires. Let us see that the skyscrapers are empty and locked, and the keys are thrown into the river. Let us break up the cities. Let us send men on a great migration: set free, purged of the commerce made manners and fat prosperity of America; ragged with the beggar's pride, starving with the crusader's fervor. Better to die of plague on the high road, seeing the angels, than live on iron streets playing checkers with dollars forever and ever. (*Prose*, p. 106)

Lindsay here exhibits the uncompromising nature of what Max Blechman has termed “revolutionary romanticism” in his book of the same name.

Though clearly radical in its critique of the emerging business culture of the early twentieth century, Lindsay’s argument was not a manifesto of class struggle. He voted for Eugene Debs in 1908, and he memorialized that vote in the poem, “Why I Voted The Socialist Ticket” (*Poetry*, p. 164). However, in the context of that poem, the reader learns that while Lindsay’s restrictive belief in the Judeo-Christian concept of original sin did not prevent him from acting on behalf of the political idealism embodied in the Socialist Party, he shied away from personally associating his utopianism with class conflict.

An acknowledged point of reference for Lindsay was Toledo’s mayor, Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones. Jones was one of the most celebrated civic reformers of the era and his combination of democratic reformist politics, non-sectarian Christian ethics, Ruskinite socialist economics, and pacifism made him attractive to Lindsay. Jones was a self-made millionaire of humble origins who once contemplated running for President as an independent. He was so respected by Eugene Debs that Debs personally offered him the presidential candidacy of the Socialist Party, but though he sometimes sought Debs’s advice and council, Jones refused to accept the nomination because he could not reconcile his Christian socialist beliefs in harmonious human relations with the idea of class struggle. Like John Ruskin, whose ideas Lindsay had once lectured about at the YMCA in Springfield, Jones’s socialism was of the paternalistic variety. Jones attempted to put “The Golden Rule” into practice at both his manufacturing plant (where it was inscribed in stone) and at city hall. He sometimes went so far as to read Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* aloud to the workers at his Acme Sucker Rod Company, confident that it was a guide to just relations between employer and employee that did not neglect the soul of the worker.

Lindsay’s desire for class harmony somewhat tenuously embraced the ideal of a universal middle class. In 1918 he wrote,

Note the *middle* class. I hold that it is the fundamental tendency of civilization to bring all men to the despised middle-class conditions, and the only practical international government would be a middle-class institution and the millionaires will be pulled down to that level, and the working people will be pulled up to that level. In short, the class-war hypothesis is a theory I utterly reject.

(*Letters*, 1979, p. 167)

Even though he advocated world government at times, for Lindsay, the social laboratory for peacefully seeking the abolition of class distinctions was his own hometown.

Perhaps the most significant and revealing of all the differences between Edward Bellamy's socialist utopia *Looking Backward* and Lindsay's *Golden Book* has to do with the latter's obsession with remaking Springfield, Illinois. In comparing their two utopias, no one could fail to notice the marked contrast between Lindsay's intense, almost microscopic localism and Bellamy's broad urban and national focus. Although Bellamy spent most of his life in the small factory town of Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, *Looking Backward* was set in cosmopolitan Boston. Lindsay, on the other hand, unashamedly located his tale in the smalltown heartland of America. Years of brooding over the fate of his birthplace evidently made him deeply aware of the many and many-sided intermingling and convoluted complexities involved in transforming a single locality, which in turn made him suspicious of, and resistant to, sweeping national or international schemes, with their programmatic panaceas and "universal" pretensions.

Most utopias are set either in wholly imaginary places or in cities that have familiar names but are portrayed so differently from their real counterparts that they might as well be purely imaginary. By focusing on a *real place*, and a small place, with all its imperfections, and attempting to envision its possible future, dreaming of ways in which it might evolve into a more desirable community, Lindsay achieved a concreteness of place and poetic intimacy rare in utopian fiction. As chronicled in *The Golden Book*, Springfield in 2018 was a city involved in the drama of a war for democracy, both abroad and at home. Though now less socially acceptable, class inequities still rear their ugly heads in the Springfield of 2018. *The Golden Book*, then, combines a militantly local focus with a willingness to concede that the newly evolving society still leaves something to be desired.

## The Ishmaelite Factor

Beyond addressing class inequities, his concern with eradicating white supremacy in America led him back to his own doorstep. Unlike Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Lindsay's *Golden Book* had multiracial characters and questioned the very premise of racial classification. His



poetic solution to the problem of race in *The Golden Book* is the rise of a “New Springfield Race” coming about as a result of “marvelous intermarriages” (p. 279-80). It is no accident that one of the main characters of the novel, Lindsay’s future Goddess of Springfield—the nineteen-year-old Avel Boone—is herself of mixed race with a life that spans two centuries. In order to envision a future beyond race, Lindsay needed a heroine that would herself embody, and be the standard bearer for, his democratic dreams. We are told that her father Black Hawk Boone was a direct descendent of not only frontier hero Daniel Boone but the Sauk Indian Chief Black Hawk. In one of the earlier versions of the book, Black Hawk Boone has “a lion beard like Karl Marx,” and his son (Avel’s brother) Washington Boone is described as “a youthful combination of Tolstoi and Johnny Appleseed.” In fact, it was the historical Black Hawk who had waged war against the American government in an attempt to prevent the forced relocation of his people from their traditional lands in Illinois to make way for the same pioneers that Black Hawk Boone also represents by dint of his European heritage.

Lindsay, in creating the creole character of Black Hawk Boone and giving him a central place in the Springfield of the future, has magically overcome racial barriers that in his own time proved insurmountable. In many ways the book is Lindsay’s avowed response to the Springfield Race Riot of 1908. That event, with its lynchings and carnivalesque atmosphere, greatly disturbed him. The Riot, to which Lindsay was an eyewitness, was the historical catalyst which initially prompted him to seek a utopian resolution, not just for Springfield’s racial problems, but for those of America. Journalist William English Walling, who was an eyewitness reporter for *The Independent*, called Springfield the city that had “no shame” (Senechal, p. 176). While Springfieldians denied there even was a race riot, it was such a national disgrace that it became the impetus for the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. *The Golden Book*, more than any other utopian novel up to that time, used the freedom of fiction to create a cast of characters that embodied a non-racial future.

Rather than accepting Lindsay biographer Ann Massa’s melting pot assessment of his racial vision, I argue that Lindsay’s ideas went beyond mere assimilation. In one of the early partial drafts of *The Golden Book*, a character of mixed Indian and European descent, renowned for his pride, and courage, is given a name with militant abolitionist allusions, John Brown Logan, preacher of the “Red Indian Truth.” Later in that

manuscript Lindsay says, “The death most worth dying in America was that of John Brown” (Vachel Lindsay Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville). The Logan character was eventually subsumed into Black Hawk Boone, who, like John Brown Logan, is proud of his Native American ancestry.

Moreover, the Boone family characteristically sport long hair flowing down their backs and crimson-dyed left hands. Avanel, however, throughout most of the novel, refuses to publicly wear her hair long or dye her hand because it seems to her to unnecessarily set the Boones apart. She does so only after a racist incident leads to the death of her father at the hands of a lynch mob made up of four men who had just burned an African American man alive in Chicago before coming to Springfield. Clearly the millennium, where racism will be a thing of the past, has not yet come to Springfield. Yet Avanel’s response to this racist attack is not to fearfully shrink into an assimilated identity but to defiantly reaffirm her Indianness. *The Golden Book* is not a naive ode to multiculturalism where everybody gets to live happily ever after.

When talking about the Boone family in *The Golden Book*, Lindsay—who acts as our narrator/guide to Springfield in 2018—says, “there is a touch of the uncanny, the restless, the Ishmaelite about all these Boones, they have no business in the streets of a town. They look like dressed up woodchoppers, all but that trim Avanel” (pp. 62-3). Perhaps Lindsay the novelist created Avanel Boone just as James Whitcomb Riley had created the bound girl “Little Orphan Annie” as a veiled Ishmaelite, but on a much grander scale. Like the picture Lindsay (himself a vagabond of sorts) paints of the wandering Boones, who came up to Springfield via Cairo (located in the southern part of the state near the Kentucky border), the historical people known as the Ishmaelites were not settled “town folk.”

Where did they come from? As Avanel says, in an earlier manuscript of *The Golden Book*, “The only way to find me is to beam centuries back and join Sir Walter Raleigh and sail to far off traditional Virginia” (Vachel Lindsay Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville). One historically speculative response to Avanel’s challenge necessitates a journey to the wilderness that once lay between the first two English settlements in America, Raleigh’s Roanoke and Jamestown. Here lies the Great Dismal Swamp, where European indentured servants fleeing bondage mixed their genes with those of the Powhattan Indians and escaped slaves of African descent, then later trekked west to Kentucky, and when it became a slave state, headed to Illinois.

Who were the historical Ishmaelites to whom the fictional Boones might be related? The 10,000 wandering Ishmaelites were a nomadic people who came to Illinois from Kentucky. They followed a migratory route northwest from Indianapolis to the Kankakee River south of Lake Michigan, from there south through eastern Illinois to Mahomet in the vicinity of Champaign-Urbana and Decatur, and finally due east, back to Indianapolis. The local settlers called them “grasshopper gypsies” and wanted no part of their anarchic ways. The potent Ishmaelite triracial hereditary mixture of fugitive peoples (Maroons, uprooted Native Americans, and escaped indentured servants of European descent) was more than the settlers could handle. To top it all off the Ishmaelites, having just escaped chattel slavery, doggedly refused the “wage slavery” of the industrial north as well.

In Springfield, as late as 2001, there was a small Moorish Science Church on the East side of town, whose Midwestern roots can be traced back to the dispersion of the Ishmaelites as a result of the draconian “Indiana Plan” of 1907, passed into law at a time when the eugenics movement was in full swing. The law called for the forced sterilization by castration of “inferior races” and was particularly directed at the Ishmaelites. As historian Hugo Leaming has noted in reference to the gravity of the situation,

Adherents of the Progressive Movement lent their support to what they considered another social reform, and the law spread to twenty-nine other states between 1907 and 1931. European eugenicists watched Americans pioneer in this field, and by the early 1930s the Indiana Plan had spread to seven other nations, including Nazi Germany. (Sakolsky and Koehline, p. 45)

If Lindsay’s fictional Boones are Ishmaelites, it is their “multiracial” family tree from which Lindsay has plucked Avel Boone, the Amazon Warrior Goddess who will boldly lead Springfield into the future. Lindsay clearly opposed eugenics and did not choose Avel as his heroine because the Boones had successfully assimilated themselves into the dominant culture. It is the Boones’ vibrant *métissage* of Indianness, Africanness, and pioneer stock which he prizes. As he approvingly observes in *The Golden Book*, “Many of their young girls look more like young Indian maids from a government reservation school, than people of Caucasian stock” (p. 60). Unlike most of his fellow Springfieldians, Lindsay is not frightened by racial mixing but uses it as a symbol of his hope for an end to racial animosities.

In 1917, Lindsay attended a municipal ceremony in which he officially presented a Springfield flag which he had commissioned for the city. Mayor Baumann's speech on that occasion emphasized "harmonious cooperation" and "a just relation of all citizens, one to another." Lindsay, as might have been expected, read his early Springfield civic poems, "Springfield Magical" and "On The Building of Springfield." Then, surprisingly, he chose to publicly refuse to be classified as white by reciting "Our Mother Pocahontas," a poem he had composed that same year. In lines that invoked not only his grandmother Mary Ann Cave's Indian lineage, but, Avanel, the Ishmaelite heroine of the New Springfield, he intoned:

We here renounce our Saxon blood  
Tomorrow's hopes, an April flood  
Come roaring in. The newest race  
Is born of her resilient grace.

(*Poetry*, p. 294)

## The Anarchist Trace

True, Lindsay did not consider himself an anarchist. In his public statements, it is evident that Lindsay thought the State should be reformed rather than abolished. Yet constructing a reformed government is not the focus of *The Golden Book*. In fact, Springfield's government is barely mentioned in the book, except in derogatory terms. In order to understand Lindsay's utopian stance more fully, one must go beyond his ideas on governance *per se* to consider his aforementioned brushes with Kropotkin and the Ishmaelites, who were not only reputed to be mystics and visionaries but anarchists as well (see Sakolsky and Koehnline, 1993), and with American communal Fourierism via the Integral Phalanx in central Illinois. In terms of Fourier's philosophy itself, we must consider Lindsay's accordance with the Fourierist conception of the artist as prophet and the desire to make art an intrinsic part of everyday life (McWilliam). In fact, anarchist traces can be found throughout Lindsay's life and art. Even conventional biographers like Ann Massa cannot help but acknowledge his "considerable interest in anarchist revolutionary tendencies" (p. 87). She even makes note of his seeing "a means to equality in anarchy" (p. 49). Where then do the roots of Lindsay's anarchist tendencies lie?

In Lindsay's era anarchism was an intrinsic part of radical politics in Illinois. When he was seven years old, the Haymarket anarchists of Chicago were imprisoned for their activism in the struggle against wage

slavery in general and for the eight-hour day in particular. Their imprisonment aroused worldwide indignation and an international outcry led by among others William Morris. Though innocent of the bombthrowing charge leveled against them, since they were on the speakers' platform at the time the bomb was thrown, four of the Haymarket anarchists were hanged. Others who had been imprisoned were eventually pardoned in 1893 by one of Lindsay's personal heroes, Governor John Altgeld. As a boy, Lindsay could see his neighbor Altgeld from his bedroom window pacing the courtyard at the governor's mansion, deep in thought on the issues of the day. He wrote the poem "The Eagle That Is Forgotten" in part to commemorate Altgeld's courageous act in exonerating the remaining Haymarket anarchists and thereby reaffirming the right to dissent as a democratic value—even if it meant being called an anarchist himself—as he was by daily papers in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere, despite his being a high-ranking government official.

In 1910, the prominent anarchist spokesperson Emma Goldman lectured at Springfield's Fortune's Hall (on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Monroe Streets). On February 9 and 10 she delivered two educational lectures, "Anarchism and What It Really Stands For" and "Marriage and Love." Accompanying her was her companion Ben Reitman whose own talk was to be on the subject of "Free Speech." Whether Lindsay attended these lectures or not is pure conjecture. We do know, however, that 1909-1912 were years that Lindsay was at home in Springfield except for occasional out-of-town debates and lectures, and that 1910 was the year he put out the *Village Magazine* and did his Ruskin lectures at the YMCA. So it is entirely possible that he was either in attendance or at least read the newspaper accounts of the lectures. The *Illinois State Journal* covered only the prior debate over whether or not they would be allowed to speak at all which was a subject of great controversy in Springfield. Police Chief Kramer was opposed to it, but Mayor Schnepf agreed to it at the last minute, provided that the police would monitor the situation in order to stop the meeting if the "gathering develops into an anarchist assemblage of the customary sort." He then added that Goldman would be arrested if she "incites hearers to riot or bloodshed" (*Illinois State Journal*, p. 115). In any case, we do know that Lindsay was a strong defender of free speech for all, including anarchists. We can safely assume that he would have responded favorably to the sentiments expressed in the notices appearing in the *Illinois State Register* and on

the printed card which announced the event by posing the question, “Do You Believe In Learning Things For Yourself?”

Apart from any Springfield experiences with Emma Goldman that Lindsay might have had, New York City’s anarchist milieu had earlier provided a turning point in his artistic life in which Goldman was indirectly involved. The Sparrow Short character, who is an art teacher in *The Golden Book*, is clearly more than Massa’s conception of him as an “apolitical pacifist” who stubbornly opposes reform in Springfield (p. 126). The nature of his opposition is really understandable only if he is seen as an anarchist who is therefore concerned with encroachments on individual freedom and suspicious of governmental solutions to both domestic and international social problems. Lindsay had in fact personally encountered the more bohemian form of anarchism associated with the art world during his days as an art student in New York City. He did not embrace it himself, considering its rejection of the rule of law and government to be based on a mistaken idealism. Yet he still recognized the anarchist impulse as the basis for an irrepressible form of visionary thinking whose idealism was itself admirable.

Most speculation about the Sparrow Short character revolves around whether he is in reality William Chase, one of Lindsay’s New York art teachers. My interpretation of the character is that he holds an even more striking resemblance to another of his teachers, the painter Robert Henri with whom Lindsay studied at the New York School of Art. As Lindsay was to put it, “Chase is much broader than Henri, in life and art. But Henri is electrical, intense, fascinating” (Ruggles, p. 87). Henri’s most inspirational lesson was essentially the libertarian message that was the same as that of Sparrow Short, who says in *The Golden Book*, “live like the sparrow. Be yourself completely. Utter your soul, regardless of cost” (p. 51). After hearing him perform his musical poem “The Tree of the Laughing Bells” in his New York studio, Henri advised Lindsay in 1908 to give up his aspirations in the visual arts and drop out of art school to fully concentrate on his poetry. Up until then Lindsay had been uncertain about which creative path to follow. Henri was to later write in a letter to Lindsay in 1926, just three years before the former’s death, that one of the great memories of his life had been that day in his studio when he had put Lindsay on his future path: “I had said to myself; ‘This fellow is a poet—he is a singer of songs’”(Ruggles, p. 94).

Henri, though, was more than just a kindly old art teacher. After his return from Paris in 1889, he considered himself to be an anarchist. As

Emma Goldman, whose portrait he painted at his studio in Grammercy Park, put it in her autobiography, “He was in fact an anarchist in his conception of art and its relation to life” (p. 529). In addition to teaching at the New York School of Art, starting in 1911 at Goldman’s urging he taught art at New York’s Ferrer Center. The educational philosophy of the Ferrer Center drew not only from the Spanish anarchism of the martyred Francisco Ferrer who had founded the Escuela Moderna in Barcelona, but upon earlier utopian communitarian experiments in radical education at New Harmony and Brook Farm.

In 1910, through the organizing efforts of such prominent American anarchists as Emma Goldman, along with freethinkers, socialists, syndicalists, single taxers, and civil libertarians, the Modern School Movement was born in New York (Avrich). In 1912, a public lecture entitled “Artists’ Hope In Anarchic Ideas,” delivered by anarchist-individualist Bayard Boyesen, was held at the Ferrer Center to celebrate Henri’s decision to inaugurate an art class there, rather than restricting his teaching to the established academy. Surrounded by Henri’s paintings, Boyesen said to an audience of sculptors, artists, and art students, “Because all genuinely inspired artists have stood for absolute freedom of consciousness they have necessarily stood exactly where the philosophic anarchists stand” (Antliff, p. 28).

Henri had been a founder of the so-called Ashcan School of painting along with John Sloan and William Glackens. Radical in its thematic concern with the “inelegant” and downtrodden, this short-lived current was a dynamite blast in the genteel provincialism of pre-Armory Show American art. From an international perspective, however, its blend of impressionism and the tenets of representational realism laid down by Paris Commune veteran Gustave Courbet was quite retrograde, far from the new directions of dada and surrealism, represented in New York at the time by the young Man Ray, himself a student of Henri’s. In a recent analysis of the overall modernist debt to individualist anarchism, cultural historian David Weir suggests “modernist art is the aesthetic realization of anarchist politics” (p. 169). Similarly, as anarchist art historian Allan Antliff contends,

Anarchism played a pivotal role in the formation and development of early American modernism. Indeed, it is fair to say that during the World War I era, anarchist discourses concerned with art were instrumental in shaping what it meant to be “modern.” Anarchism generated a distinctive modernism—a modernism of liberation for a culture *of* anarchy. (p. 216)



In fact, there was much excitement about the entire spectrum of the anarchist movement in the modernist art milieu of the time (Rosemont in Roediger and Rosemont, p. 54), and Lindsay was conceivably, if not at the center of the action, at least close enough to feel its reverberations on his own thinking and artistic expression. While Henri's politics were radical enough to embrace Ferrer's anarchism, in some ways the latter's ideas were not far from Lindsay's temperance concerns either.

Like many anarchists at the time, Ferrer advocated temperance, a healthy diet, and personal hygiene as positive traits to be cultivated by the working class. David Weir (1997) goes so far as to equate these abstemious sentiments with those of militant Haymarket anarchist Louis Lingg, who chose to bite a dynamite cap in his death row prison cell and take his own life rather than giving the State that privilege. To prove his point in relation to abstention, in a "speech" on the anarchist ideal, Weir quotes from Frank Harris' Haymarket novel *The Bomb*, first published in 1908. In it, the fiery Lingg character makes the surprising statement, "I would have a modern city with laboratories at every street corner, and theaters and art studios and dancing halls, instead of drinking saloons." Yet in the complete text of *The Bomb*, the Lingg character goes on to say that at another moment he thinks his ideal city would be built of mobile tent-like houses. He then ends his soliloquy by saying, "But why shouldn't we have both; the stable working city and the fleeting tents of joy" (pp. 190-191). Whatever the real Louis Lingg would have said, a similar tension to that of the Lingg character in *The Bomb* is mirrored in Lindsay, whose novel was published in the same era as that of Harris. The Springfieldian is at one moment the builder of the golden city and at the next the nomadic vagabond on a spirit quest. Yet whether anarchists are of an individualist or a social affiliation, both oppose the State. Lindsay, on the other hand, had an abiding faith that the State could be transformed in a democratic context.

## Johnny Appleseed Utopianism

Another noteworthy dimension of *The Golden Book's* visionary field is what I call Lindsay's "Johnny Appleseed Utopianism." By referring to Lindsay's philosophy in this way I mean to situate his novel squarely in both the historical tradition of utopian fiction and the democratic

American mythology of Johnny Appleseed. According to Paul Buhle and Edmund Sullivan in *Images of American Radicalism*,

One of the most beloved larger-than-life people, or living myths, of the American westward expansion, Johnny Appleseed is completely unique. Unlike Daniel Boone or Kit Carson he never fought Indians or Mexicans and unlike the cartoonish Paul Bunyan he never conquered “wilderness” or cut down forests of trees. Unlike African American hero John Henry, Johnny Appleseed did not even symbolize muscular strength, only a desire for peace and for planting apple trees. (p. 19)

As Lindsay saw it, it was only through the constant renewed planting of the seeds of spiritual regeneration that the millennial flower will ever bloom.

Yet *The Golden Book* itself, and the novel’s own *Golden Books* which, in Shakespearean play-within-the-play fashion, miraculously arrive in Springfield in 2018, are more like visionary seeds which must be planted and nurtured to bear fruit rather than magic wands to be quickly waved with abandon over the city so as to automatically bathe it in millennial radiance. Earlier, as a character in his 1904 poem “Aladdin’s Lamp and the Cities of the Wise,” Lindsay has the good fortune to stumble upon the lamp’s “power to fulfill millennial dreams” (*Poetry*, p. 60). In *The Golden Book of Springfield*, Lindsay sought to go further than wands or lamps. Mystical in origin and visionary in scope, the winged *Golden Books* which descend from the heavens upon Springfield in the novel require a committed response on the part of Springfieldians if their city is to be redeemed.

Lindsay, as a visionary thinker himself, once described the state of vision as “a real dream” (Massa, p. 58). In a 1906 letter to his then sweetheart Sara Teasdale in St. Louis, he describes the physical and emotional intensity of one such visionary experience as follows:

It was on the boat coming home from Europe—and about two o’clock in the morning—and this vision awoke me with terrible power—it shook me from head to foot—and I was in a daze for two or three days—and with the feeling of the completist *triumph* I have ever known. It was the turning point of my life. ‘The Building of Springfield’ and all my art sermons in Rhyme grew out of it. (Engler, p. 135)

Here was Lindsay, eyes spinning wildly in his head, hallucinating and shaking in fits of inspired delirium, with Springfield ever on his mind.

The entire *Golden Book* is in essence Lindsay's lucid dream of a dazzling Springfield alive with the wondrous inklings of a millennial future, but fraught with the dangers of the present. While some magnificent touches have been added to the cityscape, it is not a book about somewhere else. Instead it takes the ordinariness of Springfield as its starting point and saturates the commonplace with an unexpected shamanistic aura and an everyday medieval pageantry that might bubble up, ooze out, or burst forth at any moment from the most mundane quarters of the city. Even when Lindsay writes about democracy, he goes well beyond textbook political science by envisioning the voice of the people in proto-surrealist terms as a "marvelous cry of desire" (Massa, p. 88). *The Golden Book* is in this sense his attempt to tie together his "waking dreams" of a utopian Springfield in the context of a romantic novel, and his use of Johnny Appleseed as the wandering dreamer of democracy can best be seen in this inspirational light.

The official recorded history of Springfield begins with the historical figure of John Kelly, who has been designated as the founder of the city because a site near his log cabin was made a temporary seat of government for the newly formed Sangamon County in 1821. As Lindsay would have it in the novel, John "Hunter" Kelly, both disciple and friend of Johnny Appleseed and an avid reader of St. Augustine's *City of God*, would himself found a city to be symbolized by the apple tree which, though firmly rooted in the soil of Illinois, constantly grows towards heaven. Lindsay's choice of Johnny Appleseed as a poetic progenitor of Springfield reflected his long-time interest in John Chapman, the historical person from which the legendary Appleseed figure sprung.

Chapman had by Lindsay's time already become a mythic mendicant figure walking barefoot and unarmed through the forests of America often clothed in only an old sack. In proverbial Green Man fashion, he planted his apple seeds as he went and told tall tales along the way. As a Swedenborgian, Chapman preached the eternal continuity of all existence and was a pacifist. In this sense, Johnny Appleseed fit nicely the mythology of what Lindsay, himself influenced by Swedenborg, once called "the Mystic Springfield in which I always live" (*Poetry*, p. 959). In his poetic tribute to him "In Praise of Johnny Appleseed" (*Poetry*, pp. 428-435), Johnny is a laughing medicine man living on roots, bark, and hard cider apple seed dreams. Ingeniously, Lindsay decided to consecrate Springfield's birth in the blend of Swedenborgian mysticism and yeoman mythology associated with Johnny Appleseed via Hunter Kelly.

In the Lindsay novel's mythic account of the origins of Springfield, Kelly would choose a spot in Sangamon County for his new city where he would plant the magical seed of the Amaranth Apple that Johnny had given him. Unlike the apple of original sin in the Garden of Eden, the amaranth apple would return us to our lost Paradise. In this regard, Vachel's son Nick Lindsay points out in his Forward to the new edition of his father's *Tramping Across America* (1999), the ripening apple with its star of seeds is a symbol of death, transformation, and renewal. As to the latter concern with renewal, the recurring chanted song of *The Golden Book* is "Springfield Awake/Springfield Aflame." Still dreaming of the Golden City, Lindsay says of Springfield, in a March 17, 1921 letter to the Indianapolis bookseller Frederick Melcher, "I would like to see the time when this city listened so well it would be my best and only audience, and it would be rebuilt while it sang" (Vachel Lindsay Papers, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana). As Lindsay imagined it, utopian Springfield would be a city newly consecrated in poetic song—a singing city on the high road to utopia which starts at the apple tree just beyond your doorstep.

## The Golden Book Resurfaces

At the time of its publication, *The Golden Book* was barely even reviewed or discussed beyond a small circle of friends. It soon went out of print. Until its republication by Charles Kerr in 1999, with my 116 page introduction that places the book in the context of Lindsay's lifework and the utopian literary traditions of his time, it was rarely referenced as part of the limited canon of utopian fiction. At the time of this writing in 2005, Springfield is not the "singing city" of which Lindsay dreamed, and the book remains an oddity to most Springfieldians if they are aware of it at all. In his lifetime, this neglect of what he considered to be his major opus both baffled and exasperated Lindsay. As he put it in a letter to his friend and patron *Poetry Magazine's* Harriet Monroe shortly after the book came out,

All I really want is a bunch of about fifty severe but carefully written reviews of *The Golden Book*. I have not as yet one review of any kind of that volume. It has not even been mentioned or roasted. It has been *absolutely ignored*. (*Letters*, p. 214).

*The Golden Book*—which might have, as Lindsay had hoped, inspired heated debates about other single-village, local, or bioregional utopias—disappeared without ever having received a fair hearing. In a letter penned between 1917 and 1918 to Harriet Moody explaining how he was pouring his heart's blood into the writing of *The Golden Book*, he said, "I would certainly die for the book, if it would do the work I want it to do. This book seems to me to be the one thing that justifies my life" (Ruggles, p. 249). Hopefully, as we approach 2018, in the wake of a newly rekindled interest in the work of Vachel Lindsay, the soaring utopianism of *The Golden Book* might finally be recognized as the touchstone of his entire oeuvre.

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—Chisel

# My Life in the Academic Gulag

*This piece is a reflectively edited and expanded version of a previously unedited interview conducted by Jason McQuinn, the full version of which appears under the title, “A Surreal Interview with an Anarchist,” in Modern Slavery #2 (2012).*

**Jason:** *I’m someone who consciously, many years ago, decided that I did not want to become a teacher, or have too close contact with academia because I was afraid it would compromise both my vision and my will to work on radical theory and practice (with the mundane kind of pressures that you have when you’re trying to keep a job and have to work on things that you’re not so interested in to maintain that position). Anyway, I’ve tried to avoid that. But you have years of experience working in academia and also becoming a prolific anarchist surrealist author. Do you have any insights into how you withstood that pressure? Did it affect your work? Were you worried about how some of the books you’ve written would appear while you were still working in academia?*

**Ron:** Well, by the early Nineties when I first started to publish books (beginning with *Gone to Croatan*), they were completely ridiculed by both faculty and administrators at the university in which I taught. They didn’t take them seriously because they weren’t considered to be appropriate academic scholarship. Fortunately, I never considered academia to be my reference group and wasn’t interested in the career advancement that motivates academic conformity. I was much more interested in the reaction of non-academics to those books. The university that I was teaching at was originally called Sangamon State University and was located in Springfield, Illinois. It was in many ways an exciting place when it first opened its doors in the Seventies, and, to a lesser extent, even into the Eighties. By the time that I started publishing it had become way more conservative, and so my books were usually ignored or denigrated by my colleagues.

Of course, I was always aware that there was an obvious contradiction in being an anarchist who was working for a state university. However, a lot of the impetus for founding that university had come as a result of the student radicalism of the Sixties and the demand for “relevance.” I was part of that history when I was a university and graduate student. With this in mind, I saw Sangamon State as an interesting place because it offered possibilities that didn’t exist in other academic settings. Now, you could argue that such an approach essentially involved a recuperation rather than a realization of the radicalism of the student movement. While some people considered Sangamon to be radical, I never really thought so. However, I did consider it to be experimental in some ways, and I was interested in the relative freedom to innovate in the classroom and to involve myself in community activism.

The teaching part of my experience there was not the problem for me. It was more the administrative structure of higher education and academic professionalization that I detested. I loved the challenge of teaching predominantly working class students who were, like myself, often the first in their families to seek a university education. The place was established in 1970 primarily as a teaching university, rather than a publish-or-perish institution, and emphasized “public affairs” work in the community. I came there from New York in 1972. Students were able to take courses without being graded and even could design their own degrees, both of which were pretty interesting innovations. In some ways it was like the Evergreen State College, which was sort of a sister school to Sangamon State University. Everything was very student-centered and class size was relatively small. The students were on all the decision-making bodies. The faculty union initially included many young former student activists and was very strong. The school was autonomous in many ways. It had an interdisciplinary curriculum that was drawing interesting people to it. Many of these people stayed in the community after they graduated and had a counter-cultural presence there. It was originally a nexus for a lot of creative and radical energy to gather.

Five years after I arrived, the faculty unseated a very paternalistic president. They basically decided that this guy had to go. Now, that president almost certainly would not have granted me tenure given my radical politics on and off campus that had visibly upset the powers-that-be in Springfield. I knew that, and so I never expected to be there for more than five years. However, when the new president was appointed, he didn’t want to go against the faculty because they were so strong, and

they wanted to give me tenure. They were in some ways people like myself who understood where I was coming from. So I got tenure. This meant that I had a lot of freedom to do what I wanted. I certainly didn't want to squander it on careerist goals. While I could aspire to being promoted up the academic ladder and eventually becoming a full professor, for me to do that would mean playing the academic career game and that never interested me. I preferred instead to just take the freedom and run. For the next twenty or so years, I remained a lowly assistant professor. (Laughs) It didn't bother me though, because the typical careerist trade off of radicalism for promotion was so obviously unacceptable to me.

**Jason:** *You never had to be head of the department?*

**Ron:** At first there wasn't even a departmental chairperson, only a facilitator/coordinator who was accountable to the faculty rather than to the administration. However, while I was able to teach my heresy, the administration didn't like me to act it out in the street. That's always what most bothered the administration about me. They didn't like it when I self-published power structure studies on the city of Springfield or got arrested at anti-war demonstrations. While my anarchism was vaguely acceptable as long as it wasn't more than philosophical, I was constantly provoking their ire by my direct action tactics.

Not surprisingly, what eventually happened is that the university became just like any other corporate university in the state of Illinois. The interdisciplinary Justice and Social Order and the Studies in Social Change programs in which I taught were eliminated by the Board of Regents after much protest on the part of students and faculty against them doing so. Even its former name, Sangamon, which was an indigenous term meaning "place of confluence," fell on the chopping block. As part of its corporate makeover, it was renamed the University of Illinois at Springfield by the Republican-dominated state legislature. This name change was the poisonous icing on a noxious bill that was fully intended to bust the faculty union. They took our relatively autonomous local and merged it with an existing statewide bargaining unit. We were no longer a majority union, and we completely lost control of our campus. Overall, the curriculum became more standardized. I managed to retain some room to maneuver by teaching tutorials and so-called "public affairs" courses on subjects ranging from anarchy to the arts, and by my activities within the Individual Option Program, which was the

last remnant of what the entire university had once been. However, for the most part, the school became a more traditional university in all the worst ways. Once that change had happened, the university stopped attracting interesting faculty and students for the most part. The students who did subsequently attend often had no knowledge of, or attraction to, its past as a somewhat radical university.

I don't know if you've read a book called *Sundown Towns* by James Loewen? It's an incredible book. It's about the way that African American people were ethnically cleansed from small towns throughout the Midwest. Now most people think of sundown towns as having happened only in the Deep South. You know, they envision those archival photographs of roadside signs that read: "Nigger don't let the sun set on you." The message was clearly to get out of town if you knew what was good for you. After the university was restructured along corporate lines, almost all of the students who were attracted to the new University of Illinois at Springfield were from Central Illinois. Students attended simply because it was their local university. They most often came from Springfield, Illinois, which is a middle-sized city and the state capitol. In spite of its carefully polished Lincoln tourist industry image, it had once had a major race riot in 1908. Now, students increasingly come from surrounding former sundown towns that have a history of ethnic cleansing. It's a history about which they were in complete denial. In essence then, these new students were from a background that was built on a fear of diversity.

I was exposing them to radical ideas, and it was too much for many of them to handle. As a teacher, I would increasingly get the "deer in the headlights" kind of look. The student body no longer wanted to explore experimental ways of learning or radical content. That was too threatening, too upsetting. Instead, white and black students alike were largely interested in keeping the blinders on and moving straight ahead on an upwardly mobile career path to a secure job in the state or corporate bureaucracy. And that just wasn't what I was all about. Oh, I still found some students who were attracted to radical education, and it was actually an interesting pedagogical challenge to reach those entrenched in the fear-based denial of the sundown towns. Eventually though, as it became more and more of a corporate educational environment, I no longer desired to be there. I began looking around for another place to live. I originally had thought I'd teach five years at Sangamon and then head out to the west coast. In the end, I did leave and go west, and even left the United States.

**Jason:** *So, I'm curious then, since you probably have a fairly unusual experience in academia and your setting there, do you have any thoughts on the growing number of people who are both identified as anarchists and work in academia these days? Do you see any kind of trends? Do you identify with where they're at or do you think they're having a totally different experience? Does it affect what they tend to write?*

**Ron:** When I was teaching at Sangamon, though there were radicals on the faculty, there were originally no other anarchist professors. Later on, in the late Eighties to the late Nineties, there was another self-identified anarchist who taught there named Dennis Fox, and, together, in 1995, we published a critique of the university in *Radical Teacher*, entitled, "From 'Radical University' to Handmaiden of the Corporate State." But all the other campus "lefties" were either socialist feminists teaching in the Women's Studies program or straight-up Marxist academics. Many of the latter taught in the Work, Culture and Society Program, which later became the much blander Labor Studies Program as a result of an administrative edict. They were careerists for the most part who typically saw no contradiction between their radicalism and their professionalism, and, in some cases, even aspired to eventually becoming administrators themselves.

I used to think that anarchists would be more resistant to the lures of these professional accoutrements. But as more anarchists have entered academe, I have seen that the attraction to careerism is very strong. I felt isolated on campus during my teaching days, constantly paddling upstream in a sea of entrepreneurial professionalism. Today anarchists in the academy are not as alone. While many rally professional support in achieving careerist goals, some embrace mutual aid in questioning them. Some relish careerism, some get trapped in it, and some rebel against it. I don't think you can make a generalization about anarchists in the academy, but I think that academic careerism is a dead end. The whole idea of academic professionalism is based on competition for career recognition and its rewards. What I've noticed among some anarchist academics is that while they might publish their anarchist thinking, it is often only in professionally juried scholarly journals rather than in more grassroots publications. I have a lot more respect for those who publish in the latter or in both, and are also involved in campus struggles and anarchist projects in the larger world rather than merely being armchair revolutionaries.

However, because academics are in a relatively privileged position, they tend not to want to bite the hand that feeds them, particularly in a time of precarity. Consequently, even anarchist academics are often reluctant to critique the university of which they're a part. I used to criticize Sangamon a lot, and the administration hated me for it. I would not only critique the university internally on campus, but I would organize against it outside the hallowed halls of academe. Radical students and faculty would organize together routinely in the early days of Sangamon State to challenge administrative authority and question the role of the university in the larger community. If, as an anarchist, my goal was to put an end to all bosses, it was a given to me that I might as well start close to home with my own. How could I be silent? Nevertheless, I have had discussions with some anarchist academics these days who are much more cautious. I had one such strained conversation at an elitist campus dining hall, which only allows faculty and graduate students to eat and socialize there. Undergraduates are not allowed entrance. I said, "Isn't this a bit odd in the twenty-first century? Don't you think something should be done about this restriction?" The slightly irritated response was essentially something like, "No. I wouldn't want to say anything negative about, or, perish the thought, organize against the policies of, a university that benevolently allows me to espouse anarchist ideas in the classroom." What was implied was "or I might lose my privileged position."

When I first entered academia, I had naively expected to have a work-life that was illuminated by a variety of stimulating intellectual discussions with my colleagues, but I soon found out that what they mostly talked about amongst themselves in these faculty clubs were the boring details of their professional careers. I knew that if I had been on a career path, I would have had to make a lot of unacceptable compromises. One of these compromises is that in order to get your books and publications respected you have to write in a particular type of academic jargon. While I have no problem with calling myself an intellectual because we all have intellectual capacities, I've never felt comfortable identifying myself with the bureaucratic title of "academic". What a horrible, limiting way of expressing your intellectuality. Impoverished, stilted, and miserable. If academic jargon is not off-putting to you and if you're conversant with it, I suppose it can be one way of exploring the complexity of things. To me though, such typically turgid academic prose has no life to it, no poetry. Consequently, I've always been interested in breaking complex ideas down into more readily understandable terms and looking for engaging



ways to express myself beyond the circle-jerk milieu of academia.

I think some of the most heroic people who are anarchists in the university are also looking for ways beyond academic jargon. The clawing professionalism of the academic environment limits the way that you express yourself, and how you conduct yourself in the university and the world. So-called professional objectivity is expected of you. That's the way you get promoted. As I said, I was in a very fortunate position. I had tenure. I didn't have to worry about those kinds of academic constraints since promotion wasn't important to me anyway. I published not because I had to, but because I wanted to do so. If I received an unfavorable review, for example, I didn't freak out because I feared that it might jeopardize my academic career and my propped-up professional authority. A lot of people used to think I was completely insane for not complying with those professional expectations that would get me promotions, higher salaries, respectability, or recognition, and that would allow me to avoid being considered as the bad example at the university. (Laughs) When I was derisively called unprofessional by my more conservative colleagues, I simply pointed out that I was not unprofessional, but anti-professional. When I was dismissed as anti-intellectual, I explained that I was actually anti-academic. However, as time went on I had to be on the defensive more and more. Increasingly under attack, I was not willing to live my life under constant siege by sneering professional academics and administrators who held me in contempt and wanted to fuck me over at every turn. It was time to sever the velvet chains of the academic gulag.

**Jason:** *I know you went out early in retirement, or you got your retirement with some kind of deal.*

**Ron:** Well, the details basically are that I was on a lot of pretty powerful people's hit lists. They wanted to get rid of me. As the university became more conservative, I actually had been wanting to leave anyway. But I didn't tell them that. I told them that I was going to die there and that they would have to put up with me for as long as I was there. I constantly would be a thorn in their side. There was even a bounty on my head. One of the members of the business community in Springfield had said that they would make a large contribution to the university if and only if Sakolsky was gone. I knew about this offer because news of it had been leaked to me by somebody who worked in one of the administrative offices. Well, this information is great bargaining power, right? They really wanted to get

rid of me. Even if they would have to pay an exorbitant amount of loot to do so based on what I might demand from them, it would be worth their while financially because they were going to get this large contribution in the end. Armed with this knowledge, I engineered an arrangement that allowed them to be rid of me and allowed me to retire eight years early at a full professorship. So (laughs loudly!) I went from assistant professor to full professor in one fell swoop. As I say, I was ready to leave at that point. I didn't feel like I was letting the students down because those who were attracted there were no longer that interested in what I was doing anyway. The faculty members with whom I had the most camaraderie were long gone. I was ready to head west.

**Jason:** *An interesting story.... (Ron laughs again.) To move a little bit beyond your particular situation then, from my perspective it seems like the more Marxists that made it into academia the more neutered and domesticated their Marxism became. I'm wondering if you see that as somewhat being exhibited by the newest wave of anarchists in academia? I am struck by the lack of self-consciousness among anarchist academics about the potential problems of even the idea of putting anarchism in the context of academia. There doesn't seem to be much awareness or discussion of the dangers amongst those who are in academia and are anarchists these days from what I've seen. Do you have any comments on that?*

**Ron:** Yeah, I think it's crucial to have that awareness. It's a self-awareness and an awareness of the context in which you're operating. I don't see much evidence that many contemporary anarchists in the academy are seriously addressing this matter. If they are, I find it disturbing that they often tend to be a bit too sanguine about the ability of anarchist academics, in comparison to Marxist academics, to resist the temptations of careerism. The assumption they make is that either intrinsically or by strategic design, anarchism trumps academicism hands down. While anarchist academics might be less prone to careerism than their Marxist counterparts, it's still a very problematic situation. Academics are taught to problematize all kinds of things, but they often don't problematize their own privileged status as professionals amidst the pressures and temptations of the corporate academic environment. While they might regret the erosion of their professional autonomy in the bureaucratic university setting, their arguments are typically based on dismay at the loss of their privilege to administrators rather than on a call for the

eradication of privilege itself. To me, if you're not calling into question the professional-bureaucratic form of domination that exists at the university itself, then to critique hierarchy in general is kind of hypocritical. So I think there's a real need to demystify academic professionalism.

As I alluded to earlier, one concrete issue is that people who are academic anarchists often use a particularly jargon-laden writing style that is only understood by other knowledge-factory professionals like themselves. To not recognize the way in which that approach reinforces privilege is extremely shortsighted. While you could say that this jargon is a nuanced way of understanding a complicated situation, it is also a way entrepreneurial professionals typically create (if sometimes unconsciously) positions of privilege for themselves within the academic marketplace. It gives them a monopoly on a way of expression that can be exchanged for money, status, and power in the knowledge industry. As academia increasingly becomes corporatized, it's a way of creating an in-group of people who can function in that world and understand that jargon, and allow their careers to flourish within that peculiar sub-cultural setting. I understand why people take even the most odious jobs in any industry. People have to put food on the table and put a roof over their head in this crazy world. It causes them to do crazy things. However, to just assume that the corporate university is a place that's apart from the dominant reality, a utopian setting where people can fully realize their radical potential, is delusional.

Why can't more anarchist academics address the contradictions embodied by the university itself, or address the corporatization of the university from an anarchist perspective? That would be really exciting. Of course, it's risky in terms of your job, your career, and all the rest. That's something that people in those positions have to figure out what to do about. If you decide that it's too risky and you're not willing to take that route, then maybe you need to reexamine your anarchism as a practice. I'm not talking about any level of purity. I'm just talking about honestly acknowledging and examining the contradictions of being an anarchist in academia. I would constantly do things that were directly opposed to what the university wanted in terms of the way it was to be run or its role in the community. I knew that was risky, but I felt obligated to do so in terms of my own integrity as an anarchist. Otherwise, how could I look myself in the mirror each morning. When you're an anarchist working within academia, you have to decide what you're going to do in that situation. If you never recognize your own internal dilemma as an

anarchist at the university, then theorizing about anarchist ideas in other institutional contexts is a bit ludicrous.

The university is an interesting place to engage people with anarchist ideas. You obviously don't have to go to college to learn about anarchy. It's ridiculous to think so, but it's one place people do get exposed to anarchy. When I taught at the university, I thought, "I'm there for those people." Obviously though, you don't have to get a degree to be an anarchist. (Laughs) It's important to keep that in mind and not allow academic professionalism to distort the picture. Professionalism is not simply about being a "pro" (ie good at what you do), but about preserving a vested interest in knowledge as a commodity. In this latter sense, it's kind of a racket. It's not about sharing knowledge, but holding it within the profession, and then cashing it in for the perks that you get for being the possessor of that knowledge or of a certified academic degree. Not that I escaped all of the problems attached to professional status myself, but at least I recognized them and tried to deal with as many as I could to the best of my ability. I am not saying that what I did was the one path to being a politically-correct anarchist within the university. For me, it was just about recognizing the problem and then engaging with it as an anarchist.

Of course, times have changed and so has the university. Many radical students and faculty who were entering the university in the Sixties and Seventies had some hope it could become a place where radical ideas might be entertained so as to later be enacted in the outside world. The university could be challenged and made to operate in a different way. As a result, there were various attempts to bring that about. These days, as the university gets more and more corporatized, people don't expect anything of the university anymore. So, at that level I can understand why some anarchists might not be actively engaged in attempting to transform the university. They've given up on the university in that radical transformative sense. Of course, there are those who have decided that the university, though deeply flawed, can still be a useful place to research radical ideas and teach them to students. For some of these folks, acting on this realization inevitably involves dodging administrative bullets for their scholarly and activist transgressions, while for others it means keeping your head down and attempting to make a secure professional career for yourself in precarious economic times.

It's not just that the people at the university have changed or that their politics have changed from academic Marxism to anarchism, but that the university itself has changed substantially. Many people today

who are anarchists in the university don't see any point to challenging the university. Some of the most radical have defected from or deserted the politically-engaged academic model. It's a given to them that the university is going to be just as bureaucratic as anywhere else in an authoritarian society, and just as beholden to state legislatures, government grants and contracts, and corporate deals. In saying this, I'm certainly not trying to justify the growth of apathetic careerism or to encourage people to abstain from challenging university power relationships. I tend to be the kind of person who values resistance to authority as sort of a basic anarchist principle. Yet, I think one of the reasons more people aren't actively resisting internal university policies and criticizing the university's external relationship with the community is that they've given up on the idea that the university can be saved at this point. Better to occupy everything and demand nothing.

In 1995, I was arrested with fellow anarchist professor Dennis Fox at the now University of Illinois at Springfield campus (where we both taught) for the crime of informational leafleting before a speech about to be given by one of the legislative architects of the forced corporate restructuring and union busting then underway at the university. A trumped-up felony charge was leveled against me for resisting arrest. I was threatened with the loss of my teaching position and even with jail time. The charges never stuck, but the chilling effect on other faculty's opposition to the university's corporate restructuring agenda was devastating. They were reminded that they held a privileged position and the unwritten assumption is that if they let the university administration do what it does, it will let them do what they do in the classroom. Just don't create too many waves within the university or in the community, and you might be promoted or even get tenure. The lure of promotion and tenure both typically function to create an internalized process of acquiescence in which you seek to insure career advancement by gradually selling pieces of your rebel soul in return for professional and institutional rewards.

I've often seen a reluctant acceptance of authority creep up on radicals in academe, so that as they go through the process of getting promoted or tenured, they change politically without even realizing it themselves. They're not the same people that they were before. They start by thinking that this will never happen to them. On a personal level, you say to yourself, "I just want to get this tenured position so that I can attain the academic freedom to speak my heresy freely without fear of dismissal." But academic rewards like tenure typically involve a process by which

people are ground down slowly, and the gradual extinguishing of the flames of their radicalism is reinforced by their academic peers every step of the way in a professionalized version of mutual acquiescence. Like the frog in boiling water, they don't notice their dilemma until it's too late. However, as problematic as the tenure process might be, today there are fewer people who even have the opportunity to apply for tenure. Typically college teachers are not in tenure-track positions anymore, and so are vulnerable to more direct employer pressures for on-the-job conformity with no union protections. Given their precarious situation, teachers are increasingly willing to forego tenure in order to just get a teaching job, and often find themselves juggling several non-tenure track academic positions in order to make ends meet. While tenure certainly needs to be critiqued from a radical perspective because it is not all that it's cracked up to be, the increasing precarity of academic wage slavery without tenure has its own debilitating problems attached to it.

**Jason:** *The whole situation of having people who actually are carving out their research areas by focusing on studies of anarchism seems kind of risky to some degree unless they do it in a way that's going to domesticate those areas. Anything else would seem to be threatening to the university and the larger society. So it seems that if anybody's going to get into those areas in academia, they have to almost be willing to stand up and challenge things and maybe expect to lose that job. As a knowledge worker, either you're speaking up about anarchism or you're not. And if you are, it's going to be threatening unless you are somehow trying to recuperate the subversiveness of anarchy. I am wary that so many people seem to be in that position now of publicly claiming to be anarchists in academia. I see so many graduate students who are anarchists, and yet, the things they write rarely seem to have any radicalism to them. It seems that their anarchism is getting watered down or is something to avoid being open about before they have a chance to become professors. A lot of them have the goal to go on from grad school to PhD and professorship. Maybe a lot of them have some new conception of anarchism now so that they don't see it as being subversive to academia or to the larger society, but that's more of a formal philosophical radicalism.*

**Ron:** My desire in this interview has not been to condemn individual anarchist academics but to challenge the fundamental assumptions of academic professionalism from an anarchist perspective. I am not dismissive of everybody who's an anarchist in academia. However, if

such anarchists are not consciously recognizing the dangers involved in academic careerism and actively confronting them, that's a big problem.

Today, university-based anarchists are joining together as academics to form anarchist studies groups and initiatives, research institutes and archives. They have professional associations to protect themselves in a precarious and often hostile work environment, to share relevant research pursuits and to engage in a wide variety of networking practices. These professional associations solidify the ability of anarchists to be seen as bona fide academics within a university setting. They have peers, typically other anarchist academics, who review their books and verify that what they are doing is legitimate. They have access to scholarly journals and academic presses in which they can publish. They have regular professional conferences. Accordingly, they can lay claim to professional legitimacy. I see such professional associations as attempts to create a strategic beachhead within academia. I understand the need for them at that defensive level. The problem is that this approach to opening the gates of academia for anarchism is largely based on the professional model. Consequently, it doesn't specifically challenge professionalism as an ideology or adequately address the anarchist tensions in the relationship between professionalism and academia. All too often, it conveniently ignores or downplays the role of institutionalized professionalism itself as one of the hierarchical pillars of authoritarian society.





# Occupying the Citadels of the Mind

## A Review of Two Insurgent Documents from the Frontlines of Educational Revolt (2009-2012)

*After the Fall: Communiqués from Occupied California* (Berkeley: LBC Books, Feb 2010). This publication can be downloaded at the website: <http://afterthefallcommuniques.info/>, and one of the key essays, “We Are The Crisis” appears in *Occupy Everything: Anarchists in the Occupy Movement, 2009-2011*, Aragorn! ed. (Berkeley: LBC Books, 2012).

Gavin Grindon and John Jordan. *A User’s Guide to Demanding the Impossible* (London/ Brooklyn: Minor Compositions/Autonomea, 2010).

Two years before the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement came into being in September 2011, the notion of occupying physical space as an oppositional tactic was already in the air. It had previously surfaced within the nexus of the sprawling California state educational complex in the Fall of 2009, and then the following year during the December 2010 uprising of UK students; in both cases amidst a backdrop of severe educational cutbacks and the governmental austerity measures of disaster capitalism. And like the subsequent “social strike” kicked off by Québec student unrest in 2012, previous insurgent student actions in California and London were about far more than simply the economy.

Indeed, even one of the most potent and widely known slogans of OWS, “Occupy Everything/Demand Nothing,” had its origins in the militant acts and declarations of the 2009 California-based occupy movement. In turn, the California actions had in part been inspired by the occupation of the student center at the New School for Social Research in New York earlier that year. The more militant occupiers among the New School students had refused to settle for the reformist goal of ousting the university president, but had opted instead for the liberatory potential of creating a momentary opening in capitalist time and space free of demands for administrative concessions.

In *After The Fall's* "Occupation: A Do-It-Yourself Guide" the rationale for, and immediacy of, such a "no demands" strategy is explained in the exuberance of the California context:

We must reject all options on offer and demonstrate that without negotiations it is still possible to act. This is why we do not make demands. All demands assume the existence of a power capable of conceding them. Why go through the motions of negotiation when we know we will not win anything but paltry concessions. There is no power to which we can appeal except that which we have found in one another. This is why we reject the logic of representation. No representative, no matter how charismatic, can achieve anything of consequence, except to deprive us of our own agency. Having representatives reduces us, once again, to passive onlookers upon our own activity. We have to take matters into our own hands.

For an incredible moment, on the California campuses of UC Santa Cruz, UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, San Francisco State and CSU Fresno, the watchwords: "Strike/Occupy/Takeover" burned almost as brightly as the flames of the previous year's Greek insurrection. The scope of these California uprisings illuminated a flickering movement of insurrectional "communes" that were not seen merely as alternative spaces, but as nomadic war machines to be deployed in the ultimate destruction of capitalist society in accord with the anarchist and anti-state communist ideas of those who struck the match.

In this insurrectionary context, the "Communiqué From An Absent Future: On the Terminus of Student Life," signed by Research and Destroy, can be appreciated as a poetic expression of this occupation strategy. In their words:

We demand not a free university but a free society. A free university in the midst of a capitalist society is like a reading room in a prison; it serves only as a distraction from the misery of daily life. Instead we seek to channel the anger of the dispossessed students and workers into a declaration of war... We must constantly expose the incoherence of the demands for democratization and transparency. What good is it to have the right to see how intolerable things are, or to elect those who will screw us over? We must leave behind the culture of student activism, with its moralistic mantras of non-violence

and its fixation on single-issue causes. All of our actions must push us towards communization; that is, the reorganization of society according to a logic of free giving and receiving.

This impassioned outcry was marked by the refusal of “social death,” the negation of the illusion of “social peace,” a strident call for “social rupture,” and an affinity with the dual strategy of “civil war” and “communization” promulgated by the Invisible Committee in their widely circulated book, *The Coming Insurrection*.

In this expansive sense, occupying a building is only a first step in overthrowing the system of social relations and structures upon which the capitalist state is built. Beyond vehement opposition to the specifics of costly new university capital projects undertaken at the expense of student learning needs, the university’s role as an already barricaded domain of class reproduction was challenged as a larger “anti-capital” project. Not only were the coffers of the university bankrupt, but the whole idea of the university as a bastion of upward mobility and economic security had been replaced by the likelihood of a precarious economic future. Moreover, no longer could universities be conceived of as lively arenas of intellectual pursuit. Rather, they had become professionalized, careerist and corporate to the bone. Instead of inspiring free thinking, they had mainly become a machine for manufacturing compliant producers and consumers; offering most students only a one-way ticket on the down-bound train of debt slavery. Faced with the desolate prospects of university life and the doldrums of everyday reality, the occupation movement struck back, loudly proclaiming: “We Are the Crisis!”

Unlike the Berkeley student organizers of the Sixties, who fought under the banner of “Save The University,” these more contemporary Berkeley student radicals in the occupy movement equated the inadequacy of such a slogan with a call to “Save The Prisons.” In fact, UC Berkeley students even uncovered a university contract with San Quentin to use prison labor for supplying the school with classroom furniture. In rejecting Mario Savio’s famous call for protesting Berkeley students in the Sixties to put their bodies on the “gears, wheels and levers” of the university apparatus to make it come to a grinding halt so that meaningful negotiations could take place; one of the Berkeley occupiers quoted in “Voices From Wheeler Hall,” a zine which is excerpted in *After The Fall*, explains:

I disagree; we must dismantle the machine, from top down,

so that it never starts again. We will use what we need and take what we need. We will occupy, we will appropriate and, in turn, we will liberate.

Insurrectionary-minded occupiers contended that the idea of an occupation is to attract energy to the resistance, not to negotiate a settlement. As a student communiqué from occupied Kerr Hall eloquently proclaimed, “An occupation is a vortex, not a protest.” In order to avoid cooptation, the Wheeler Hall students insisted that what was needed was “a displacement, not a fusion.” Occupiers were urged to eschew liberalism by a slogan lifted from the Invisible Committee’s pamphlet, *The Call*, and written on all the Wheeler Hall chalkboards: “Live communism, spread anarchy.” Rather than being entrapped in the legalities of negotiations: adventure, imagination, spontaneity and unbridled direct action were the (mis)rule of the day. Student governance types, well-meaning but clueless faculty “observers” and their conventional student activist counterparts, were all caught unawares by the uncompromising nature and seductive appeal of such a relentless strategy of “impossibility”.

Which brings us to the UK student upheaval of November/December 2010 and the second publication under review here, *A User’s Guide to Demanding The Impossible*. This book decidedly crosses out the word demanding in its title to make a “demand nothing” point. However, such a verbal maneuver may not be necessary since the act of demanding the impossible is by definition qualitatively different from acting as if such demands can ever be satisfied within the rubric of “politics as the art of the possible” or enacted within the configuration of power known as the capitalist state or state capitalism. In essence, then, to demand the impossible is to inevitably reveal the impoverished nature of what are considered to be possible demands within the confines of consensus reality. The desired outcome is not related to the idea that radical demands can be realized through the process of reform, but that demanding reform within university politics will pale by comparison to a resistance based upon the unimpeded flight of our desires. To meaningfully address the blight of the corporate university, we must step outside of the anemic submission-inducing reach of “reasonable possibility” and into the radical realm of the impossible where the very existence of all social institutions is called into question. The point is to act on our desires without the reformist restraint of “reasonability” clouding the radical ferocity of our vision.

On December 9, 2010, the Surrealist London Action Group (SLAG)

issued its “New Alexandria” tract in solidarity with the unruly UK students. It is a case in point of demanding the impossible. Defending learning while attacking the university at its core, it read in part:

Those of us who have worked and studied on these intellectual factory farms know that education in this country has been nothing short of a disaster. Children fed poetry that’s been reduced to the literary equivalent of Turkey Twizzlers; students told that politically flabby post-New Left bullshit is the way to make sense of ‘culture’; academics chasing ever-decreasing funding by publishing in elitist journals with ever-decreasing readerships... Defend that crap? Not on your life. Where in all of this is the beautiful savagery of the mind? Learning is no commodity: it’s an acid to burn money. It’s traced in golden words of fire that fall blazing from the page, flaring and dying as we read them, gone in an explosion of unknown suns.

Curiously though, while the *User’s Guide* does not neglect surrealism as one of the touchstones of revolt, this piercing SLAG tract goes unmentioned.

While the bulk of the book takes an “art activist” approach to the volatile political landscape of November/December 2010, it does not fail to place such activism in the twentieth century historical context of art and revolution. It is a history that understands that the radical romanticism of Surrealism was built upon the radical negation of Dada, embracing and then moving beyond it in the first half of that century. As the century continued to unfold, the book moves from the Dutch Provos’ white bicycles and the Digger “free stores” of San Francisco to the Situationist-inspired salvos of King Mob in the UK, from the anarchic “gnome” gatherings of the Orange Alternative in Poland to the disruptive anarchist public theatre of the Metropolitan Indians of Italian Autonomia, and onwards from the carnivalesque Reclaim the Streets dance-parties to the technologically savvy hacktivism of the Electronic Disturbance Theatre in the Nineties.

By the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, widespread UK student unrest boiled over in opposition to proposed educational cutbacks by an austerity-minded government in the face of a banking meltdown that, as many students were quick to point out, was not a crisis that they had caused. Actions, including vehement protests and building occupations at a number of universities, were initially ignited by the November 10, 2010 trashing of

30 Millbank in Westminster, which houses the headquarters of the Conservative Party, involving serious property destruction and clashes with the police. These events were followed by the November 24 Whitehall march against fees and cuts which involved a massive student walkout from all educational institutions and an attempted protest march from Trafalgar Square to the Houses of Parliament which the police largely blocked. Later, on December 9, the date the aforementioned SLAG tract was circulated, students successfully marched from Bloomsbury to Parliament Square, opposite Parliament where they pushed over the metal barriers and occupied the central grassy area of the square. Several thousand demonstrators were kettled and beaten with truncheons by the police. Elsewhere in Central London, masked rebels smashed all of the windows on the ground floor of Her Majesty's Treasury. On Regent Street, protesters attacked a limousine carrying Charles, the Prince of Wales, and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, catching the blue-blooded parasites by surprise on their way to the evening's Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium.

It was in the December whirlwind of these Days of Action that the slim backpocket-sized *User's Guide* was written by Gavin Grindon and John Jordan. In it, they specifically thank "the crew of the occupied and soon to be occupied art schools who inspired us to get this out." Like *After The Fall*, it grew directly out of the struggle, but in the case of the *User's Guide*, it specifically showcased the new creative forms of "intervention art" developed by activist-oriented artists. The publication's aim was to introduce such interventionist practices to a larger community making them readily available to rebellious students for tactical discussion and possible inclusion in a direct action repertoire informed by both conflict and creativity. Accordingly, as was *After The Fall*, it too was initially distributed for free as an anti-copyright publication. Though it had its practical side, the book's intended purpose was not purely functional:

This guide is not a road map or instruction manual. It is a match struck in the dark, a home-made multi-tool to help you carve out your own path through the ruins of the present warmed by the stories and strategies of those who took Bertolt Brecht's words to heart: 'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.'

More than just a portable recipe book for art activism, the *User's*



*Guide* does not shy away from questioning the pretence of the art world and seeks to locate a politically-engaged art beyond mere representation. The book draws twenty first century examples from the anarcho-feminist street art projects of Mujeres Creando in Bolivia, the *escrache*-based exposes of Grupo de Arte Callejero in Argentina, the zany anti-globalization provocations of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, the Centre For Tactical Magic's Goldmanesque re-imagining of ice cream vans as vehicles for direct action dispensing not only ice cream but radical literature and gas masks, summit-hopping book blocs marching side by side with black blocs, Yo-mango's subversive assaults on consumer culture in Spain, the fabrication of shields by Climate Camp activists in London which were designed with huge haunting photographs of climate refugees emblazoned upon them so that the TV cameras would catch the police violently striking these faces with their batons, and the corrosively humorous pranks of the Yes Men everywhere. Here is a book guaranteed to offer food for thought, inspiration and an open invitation to further elaboration.

One such example chronicled within the *User's Guide* emanates from the producers of the book project itself, the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii). In 2009, they were invited to hold a workshop on art and activism at the Tate Modern, entitled "Disobedience Makes History," and end with a public performance intervention. However, unlike some practitioners of "intervention art" who are reluctant to directly take on the art world itself, Labofii did not cringe at biting the hand that feeds them. Once they had accepted the Tate's offer, they were duly informed by email that as a strictly enforced rule no artistic intervention could be made against the museum's sponsors, one of which happened to be British Petroleum. However, Labofii decided instead to use the email as material for the workshop. Projecting it onto the wall, they asked workshop participants whether they should obey the curator's edict, and deciding not to do so, proceeded to set up an art activist collective with the aim of revealing the Tate's golden handshake deal with the oil barons as a death grip on artistic freedom. A few months later the newly established collective poured hundreds of liters of black molasses inside and outside the museum during its party in celebration of twenty years of BP sponsorship, which, as objective chance would have it, was being held while oil infamously gushed from the disastrous explosion in the Gulf of Mexico of an offshore BP oil rig.

As this intervention indicates, the *User's Guide* calls for a decommodified

art beyond the self-congratulatory cynicism of the art world. In the authors' terms, what is needed is an art which allows us "to find each other amongst the ruins." Rather than being a 'political' art that is safely enclosed in a museum where it becomes "a cool cultural mask over the catastrophe that is capitalism" and "an aesthetic amplifier of the status quo," they championed a disobedient "art that does not show the world to us, but changes it." The task of radical artists in this regard is to create such art in order to dismantle and reinvent daily life so as to "step into the cracks where another world is coming into view." Beyond the now clichéd bumper sticker slogan, "Another World is Possible," lies the subversive power of impossibility. Or as some California students so bluntly put it in *After The Future*, "Another world is not possible. It is necessary."

Both artists and university occupiers (two categories that are not mutually exclusive) are urged by the authors to simultaneously *refuse* the dictates of capitalist state institutions and *build* places where the subversive power of the imagination can flourish. Ultimately, the goal is not only the abolition of the corporate university, but self-abolition. As the *User's Guide* explains:

If you're opposed to the logic of turning art or education into a market, you are already opposed to yourself as defined by that logic: you are not the artist, student or worker that capital needs. This means you have already begun to abolish yourself.

The next step then becomes one of abolishing art itself as a specialized activity that can only be undertaken by university-credentialed art professionals endowed with a closely guarded investment in cultural capital. The burning question of how we bring to life Lautréamont's prescient watch-words: "Poetry must be made by all," still hangs fire.

In this regard, we must be wary of formulating an unnecessarily heroic vision of the art activist as "engineer of the imagination". In order to avoid the trap of elitism, perhaps it might be useful to envision the "reverse imagineering" practices of pirating, appropriating and recreating in a fluid bottom-up context. If professionalism is rooted in the idea of monopoly, then the sharing of the stories, ideas and tactics of art activism in the manner of the *User's Guide*, is, at its heart, a de-professionalization project. As such, it was undertaken not to glamorize a new brand of activist art stars, but to freely disseminate the aesthetics and skills of politically-engaged art activism so that others might feel inspired to pick up the torch and run with it. Rather than the cultivation

of celebrity and audience passivity, the assumption at work here is that creative participation is the key to opening the floodgates of the radical imagination.

In a closing note, written in an explicitly surrealist context, the authors expound upon the complex nature of “demanding the impossible” that is so crucial to their project. In doing so, they redefine hope in the non-messianic immediacy of not knowing what will happen next and echo the concerns of the California student occupation statements in *After The Fall*:

Some might decry us as naïve romantics, utopian dreamers, but we know that to limit demands to what seems ‘realistic’ is a guaranteed way of reducing what is possible. Protest is beautiful because it breaks open the routines of space and time, to allow the unimaginable to flourish, its beautiful because at its heart is hope, hope that, as the Surrealists understood so deeply, dream and action can be reunited.

## EPILOGUE

The last communities do a ghost dance, and the ghosts of the last communities will continue to dance within the entrails of the artificial beast. The council-fires of the never-defeated communities are not extinguished by the genocidal invaders, just as the light of Ahura Mazda was not extinguished by rulers who claimed it shone on them. The fire is eclipsed by something dark, but it continues to burn, and its flames shoot out where they are least expected.

Fredy Perlman

*Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*

Detroit: Black and Red, 1983, p. 299



A dynamic collage of ideas, images, and action—ranging widely from mayday to utopia, from refusal to autonomy, and from insurrection to imagination.

This book is in turn defiant, reflective, and playful—a brick for hurling through the windows of despair and a doorway to creating an anarchy that is not afraid to dream.

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